B. D. GRAHAM

The Formation of the Australian Country Parties

A. N. U. PRESS

THE FORMATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY PARTIES

B. D. Graham

THIS book analyses the social and economic factors which led to the rise of the Country Parties in Australia, and shows that they were related to the agrarian parties of the Canadian Prairie Provinces and the American Mid-West. All these movements, Dr Graham suggests, reflected the social insecurity of the countrymen as well as their determination to improve their economic status and to gain a more secure position in the political structure of their community.

The marketing and price controls introduced during World War I had a direct effect on the agricultural and pastoral interests of Australia, and members of this faction entered politics with the object of forming efficient and vigorous pressure groups and country parties in Parliament.

By 1920, such parties had been formed in all but the Tasmanian Parliament, and the National and Labor Parties found themselves experiencing the utmost difficulty in coping with the new arrival. In their first years, the Country Parties experimented with a variant of the balance-of-power strategy, used by several of the Labor Parties before the war, but by 1923 they had adopted the policy of co-operating with the Nationalists in government and parliament.

A new balance had been achieved within the Australian party system, but this book suggests that the ease with which the Country Party was tamed has been exaggerated, and that the new role was not accepted without dissent by the Country Parties' rank and file.

Jacket design by A. R. Stokes

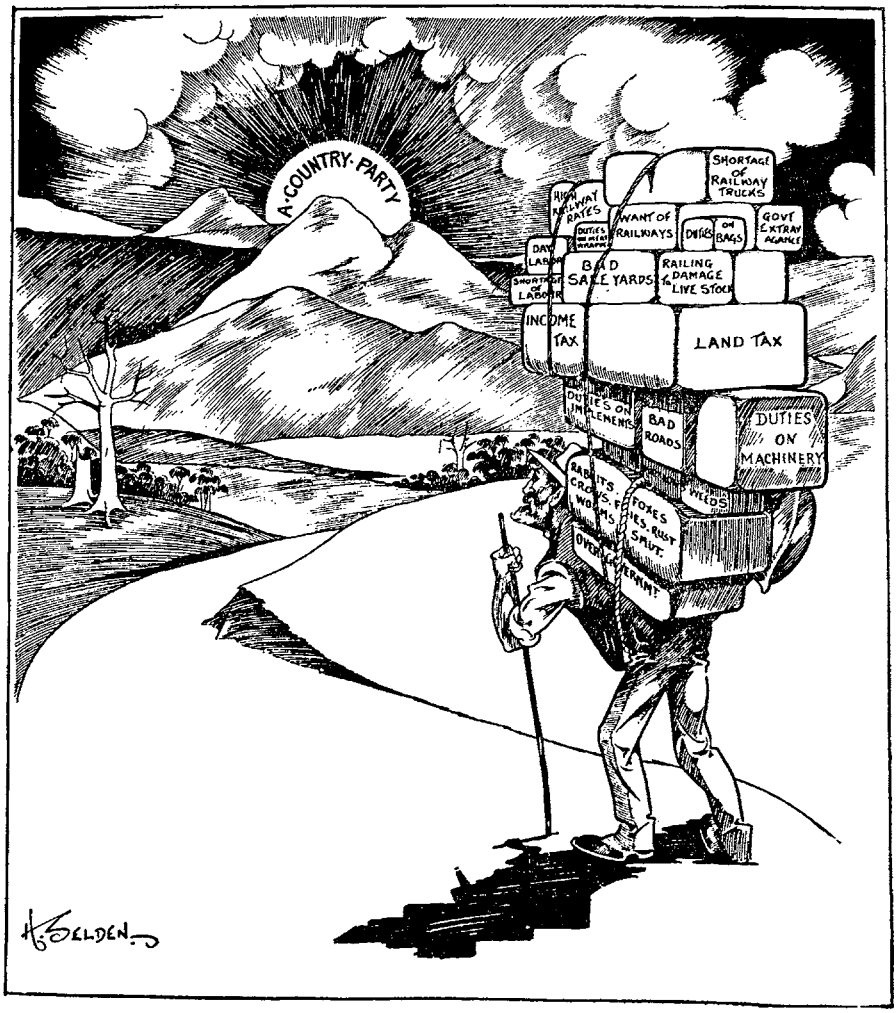
$A6.90

This book was published by ANU Press between 1965–1991.

This republication is part of the digitisation project being carried out by Scholarly Information Services/Library and ANU Press.

This project aims to make past scholarly works published by The Australian National University available to a global audience under its open-access policy.

The Formation of the Australian Country Parties



HIS ONLY HOPE.

From *Pastoral Review*, 15 April 1913

The Formation of the Australian Country Parties

B. D. GRAHAM
Lecturer in Politics
University of Sussex

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY PRESS
CANBERRA

First published 1966

This book is copyright; reproduction in whole or part, without permission, is forbidden

Text set in 10 on 11 point Linotype Baskerville with 18 point Baskerville headings, and printed on 25" × 40" 60 lb Burnie English Finish paper by Halstead Press Pty Ltd, Sydney

Registered in Australia for transmission by post as a book

For my Mother and Father

Preface

This study is a revised version of a Ph.D. thesis, 'The Political Strategies of the Australian Country Parties, from Their Origins until 1929', prepared while I was a Research Scholar at the Australian National University, Canberra, between 1955 and 1958. It combines an examination of the electoral and parliamentary strategies of the first Australian Country Parties, and their effect on the party system, with an account of the social and economic factors which produced these parties and enabled them to survive. A brief history of similar agrarian movements in North America has been included to illustrate the parallels between experience in the two continents.

I am indebted to many people for assistance, particularly to the late Professor Leicester Webb, who supervised the original thesis and suggested ways in which it might be revised, and to Mr Ulrich Ellis, who helped me with advice and information when I was writing my thesis and allowed me to read both his books in manuscript. I should also like to thank Professor R. McD. Chapman, who was a joint supervisor of my work in 1955 and suggested many fruitful lines of inquiry; Professor R. S. Parker, who acted as my supervisor during Professor Webb's absence in 1957 and who criticized in detail the early drafts of the revised manuscript; Dr R. A. Gollan, Dr C. A. Hughes, Dr D. B. Heron, Professor D. A. Low and Dr D. A. Aitkin, who read and discussed various of the drafts with me; Mrs Pauline Fanning, head of the Australian Section of the National Library of Australia, Canberra, whose advice about source materials was quite invaluable; Mr B. D. Shields, Archives Officer of the Australian National University, who allowed me to refer to certain papers in his repository; Mr J. F. Dredge, General Secretary of the Australian Country Party (N.S.W.), Mr W. H. Louch, General Secretary of the Victorian Country Party, Mr A. G. Traine and Mr C. A. Harman, successive General Secretaries of the Farmers' Union of Western Australia, and Mr W. E. L. de Vos, Secretary of the Graziers' Association of New South Wales, who granted me access to the early records of their associations and permitted me to quote certain material from them; Mr G. A. Manning, Assistant General Manager of Elder Smith Goldsbrough Mort Limited, who allowed me to cite passages from the Goldsbrough Mort papers; Mr R. Y. Wilson, General Secretary of the Liberal and Country League of South Australia, and Mr B. H. Gaskin, then Secretary of the New England New

State Movement, who allowed me to read the early records of their respective organizations; Mr L. F. Fitzhardinge, Reader in History at the Australian National University, who arranged for me to see certain parts of the W. M. Hughes Papers, deposited in the National Library of Australia; Professor Henry Mayer, Dr F. K. Crowley, Mr Alan Davies and Mr Alan Morrison, who advised me on sources and points of interpretation; and Professor N. G. Butlin, Dr Alan Barnard and Mr K. L. Kinsman who guided me to material on the economic history of the period.

Some of the material in chapters 4 and 5 has already appeared in articles published in *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand* ('Graziers in Politics, 1917 to 1929', VIII, 32, May 1959, pp. 383-91; 'The Country Party and the Formation of the Bruce-Page Ministry', X, 37, Nov. 1961, pp. 71-85), and in the *Australian Journal of Politics and History* ('The Place of Finance Committees in Non-Labor Politics, 1910-30', VI, 1, May 1960, pp. 41-52; 'The Choice of Voting Methods in Federal Politics, 1902-18', VIII, 2, Nov. 1962, pp. 164-81), and I should like to thank the editors of these journals for permission to reproduce certain information contained in these studies. I am also grateful to the Library Board of Western Australia for permission to cite an extract from a paper in the Premier's Department Files, held in the J. S. Battye Library of Western Australian History, Perth, and to the Pastoral Review Pty Ltd, Melbourne, for allowing me to use a cartoon from an early *Pastoral Review* for the frontispiece of this book.

When I first embarked on this study in 1955 I consulted some of the papers of the late Dr R. W. Rolph, held in the Library of the Australian National University, but found that the bulk of his research concentrated on post-depression politics and consequently on problems which were beyond the scope of my thesis.

My thanks are due to the staffs of the National Library of Australia, Canberra; of the Library of the Australian National University, Canberra; of the Mitchell Library, Sydney; of the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne; of the J. S. Battye Library of Western Australian History, Perth; of the Public Library of South Australia, Adelaide; of the Oxley Memorial Library, Brisbane; and of the Australian National University Archives. I should also like to acknowledge my debt to Mr Hans Gunther, of the Department of Geography, Australian National University, who so competently drew the maps in this book; to Mrs Patricia Corbett, of the Department of Political Science, Australian National University, who studied the source materials on the history of the wheat industry for me; to the staff of the Australian National University Press who took so much trouble in guiding the book to publication; and to Mrs I. Guenot, Mrs E. Heron, Mrs K. Tinnion, and Mrs N. Willis, who typed portions of the various drafts.

I am especially grateful to Miss Geraldine O'Connell, of the Department of Political Science, Australian National University, who assisted not only in the collection and analysis of data on the wheat industry

and electoral trends, but in checking references and preparing the final manuscript; and to N.B.G. who has given me a great deal of assistance at every stage of my research and writing.

During 1956, when I made several research trips to the capital cities and country centres, I received hospitality and assistance from many more people than it is possible to mention individually here. I should like to thank them all for the insight which they gave me into the early days of the Country Parties, and to express my particular debt to the Hon. C. L. A. Abbott, Mr W. P. Bluett, Colonel M. F. Bruxner, Mr A. E. Cosh, the late Mr Harold Hanslow, Mr Davis Hughes, Sir Charles Latham, Sir Albert Lind, Mr J. A. Lorimer, Mr J. P. McCurry, the late Mr R. S. Vincent, Mr J. T. Wearne and Mr M. E. Wettenhall.

It should be noted that in the course of revision I have considerably reduced the volume of references and have abridged certain narrative sections in the original thesis, which may be consulted in the Library of the Australian National University, Canberra. A source list of election returns is given as an appendix in the original thesis, but the electoral data used in this book has been taken from drafts of a 'Handbook of Australian Politics, 1890-1963', at present being prepared by the Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University, under the direction of Dr C. A. Hughes. The returns for the 1917-29 period prepared by me have been incorporated in this work.

B.D.G.

University of Sussex
December 1965

Contents

		PAGE
	Preface	vii
	Abbreviations	xiv
1	Agrarian Politics in the New Lands	1
2	Origins	31
3	The Country Party Movement Takes Shape	55
4	Wartime Politics and the Country Parties, 1914-1919	96
5	Problems of Strategy and Orientation, 1920-1923	143
6	The Coalition Strategy on Trial, 1923-1925	196
7	Agrarian Discontent and Country Party Revivalism, 1925-1929	236
8	Orthodox Country Parties in Government and Opposition, 1925-1929	267
9	Conclusion	291
	Select Bibliography	297
	Index	313

Illustrations

Cartoon: His Only Hope — *frontispiece*

Maps:

1 F.S.A. Branches, Western Australia, 1914 — 91

2 Wheat Farming Regions, Victoria, 1916-1917 — 136

3 State Election, Victoria, 21 October 1920 — 137

4 Wheat Farming Regions, New South Wales, 1919-1920 — 140

5 State Election, New South Wales, 20 March 1920 — 141

6 Wimmera, 1928 — 257

7 Echuca, 1928 — 258

Abbreviations

A.C.P.A.	Australian Country Party Association
A.F.F.O.	Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation
C.P.A.	Country Party Association
N.S.W. F.S.A.	New South Wales Farmers and Settlers' Association
P.P.A.	Primary Producers' Association
P.P.U.	Primary Producers' Union
Q.F.U.	Queensland Farmers' Union
S.A. F.S.A.	South Australian Farmers and Settlers' Association
T.F.S.O.A.	Tasmanian Farmers, Stockowners and Orchardists' Association
U.C.G.A.	United Cane Growers' Association
U.G.A.	United Graziers' Association
V.C.P.	Victorian Country Party
V.F.U.	Victorian Farmers' Union
W.A. F.S.A.	Western Australian Farmers and Settlers' Association
C.L.R.	Commonwealth Law Reports
P.D.	*Parliamentary Debates*
P.P.	*Parliamentary Papers*

(Thus *C.P.D., Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*; *V.P.P., Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, etc.)

S.M.H.	*Sydney Morning Herald*

I

Agrarian Politics in the New Lands

Australians have for years watched their Country Parties obstinately holding on to life, defying predictions of impending extinction. For more than forty years they have asserted the right of the rural communities to have separate representation in Parliament, and to play an important part in the making of national policies. Their survival is a measure of the confidence which the Country Parties still inspire in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, not only because many rural people see them as standing for their economic rights and privileges and for rural development, but also because they play a symbolic role in the political mythology of the Australian countryside. Caught between the two great social facts of colonial Australia—the large coastal cities and the pastoral kingdoms of the hinterland—the agrarian and country-town communities sought to assert their values, the virtues of an agrarian way of life.

The populist character of the Australian Country Parties has often been overlooked, mainly because their similarity to the agrarian movements of North America has not received sufficient recognition. The development of Australian agriculture in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the resultant growth of the new small-landholder communities and country towns, and the appearance of a new form of agrarian protest, have to be seen as part of a wider social and economic movement which was affecting the United States, Canada, and such South American countries as Argentina also. In terms of production and land use alone, the pace of development in the mid-western prairies of North America, the pampas of Argentina, and the plains and downland belts of south-eastern and south-western Australia, was exceptionally swift during the period 1860-1914. Wheat production in the U.S.A. increased from 152 million bushels in 1866 to 499 million in 1880;[1] in the Canadian prairie provinces the area of occupied land rose from 10 to 70 million acres and wheat production from 20 to 209 million bushels between 1896 and 1913;[2] the Australian wheat crop grew from

[1] Solon Justus Buck, *The Granger Movement. A Study of Agricultural Organization and its Political, Economic and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880*, p. 29.

[2] S. M. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Coöperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan, A Study in Political Sociology*, p. 22.

10 million bushels in 1860-1 to 100 million in 1913-14;[3] and in the U.S.A., Canada, Argentina and Australia taken together, the annual average wheat acreage rose from 56·44 millions to 87·51 millions and the annual average wheat production from 599·7 million bushels to 1,129·1 millions between the quinquennia 1885-9 and 1909-14.[4]

Such an expansion was the product of several factors, among which were the revolution in overland and ocean transport, the improvements in farm technology, the growth of urban and industrial markets in western Europe, and the flow of immigrants to the new world. Railways were the arteries of the great wheat regions. The agricultural settlement of the North American prairies was made possible by the transcontinental railways begun in the 1860s and extended in the seventies and eighties; the development of the Argentine pampas was dependent on the railway network based on the Rosario-Cordoba and the Rosario-Santa Fe lines; the growth of the Australian wheat industry in the Riverina, the Wimmera and later in the Mallee was accompanied by the extension of the south-eastern railway systems centred on Sydney and Melbourne. The supplanting of sailing vessels by steamships in the last half of the nineteenth century provided faster and cheaper transport of the crop to the old world. Mechanical advances (such as the mowers, twine-binders, reapers and threshing machines of the 1850s and 1860s, and the combine-harvester of the eighties), improved fallowing techniques, the use of selected varieties of wheat and the application of artificial fertilizers, made possible the farming of larger units, increased the emphasis on single-crop production and caused the problem of farm finance to become a much more formidable one. A steady supply of immigrants further aided the development of the wheat areas: in the U.S.A., the combined population of the Dakotas, Nebraska and Kansas rose from 501,573 in 1870 to 2,997,533 in 1890; in the 1880s alone, 643,000 persons migrated to Argentina; and about one million people settled in the Canadian prairie provinces between 1896 and 1913.[5] In Argentina and Australia the state actively intervened to promote closer land settlement and, in Australia, to build roads and railways to newly opened areas.[6]

The feature which most distinguished these new wheat lands from the older farming regions was their politics. In North America, wheat farmers participated in a number of explosive, if short-lived, political movements which temporarily disoriented the American and Canadian party systems, and in Australia they formed a militant and politically

[3] *Primary Industries, 1956-57. Part I, Rural Industries.* Bulletin No. 51, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Canberra, 1958, p. 29.

[4] Wilfred Malenbaum, *The World Wheat Economy, 1885-1939*, pp. 236-9.

[5] John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt. A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, pp. 16 and 20; Malenbaum, op. cit., p. 136; Lipset, op. cit., p. 22.

[6] For a full survey of the expansion see Malenbaum, op. cit., ch. 8, pp. 127-53.

restless group whose impact on the party system, although it came later, was nevertheless more lasting. The North American movements in their spontaneity, their enthusiasm and their lack of staying power were reminiscent of the peasant *jacqueries* of the old world, except that they possessed a definite structure and specific policies and objectives. They are of interest to us here in that they set a new style in agrarian politics, creating a pattern for farmer or country parties which was to be followed in other countries and in less militant agricultural regions. The exception was Argentina, where most of the Spanish and Italian peasants who settled in the pampas were politically quiescent, and those few who became big landowners took to *élite* politics, virtually losing their rural identity.

Agrarian Movements in the U.S.A., Canada, and Australia before 1914

The inflation and subsequent fall in grain prices which followed the Civil War caused great distress in the American North-West and indirectly aided the formation in 1867 of an organization known as the National Grange of Patrons of Husbandry. Commonly referred to as 'The Grange', it consisted of a series of local lodges modelled, both in terms of structure and of ritual forms, on those of the Masonic Order. At first the Grange directed its activities along educational and cultural lines, but by 1872 it had taken up demands for the reduction of rail freights and for co-operative enterprise in the buying and selling of goods. Strongest in the Mid-Western and Southern States, it had, by October 1875, a national membership of 758,767 organized in 19,007 local granges.[7] Although it sprang from a long tradition of agrarian protest, expressed before the Civil War by the free-soil and free-homestead agitations, it represented a new order of demands, for it entered politics not so much to free the land as to break the grip of private business on the commodity market. Moreover, while the Grange movement embodied Jacksonian values, especially in its stress on political and economic equality and in its hostility to the Eastern States, to monopoly and privilege, and to big business, it broke new ground in its emphasis on the need for education and social reform in frontier communities. This change in temperament was most significant. F. J. Turner has noted that, with the end of the old frontier, 'the defences of the pioneer democrat began to shift from free land to legislation, from the ideal of individualism to the ideal of social control through regulation by law'.[8]

Solon Buck and others have seen in the Grange and similar movements a strongly-backed though ill-sustained protest against the progres-

[7] Buck, op. cit., table following p. 58. Buck's study is still the standard work on its subject.

[8] F. J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, p. 277, cited in Hicks, op. cit., p. 405.

sive urbanization and industrialization of American society.[9] However, while this element of reaction against the passing of the old rural America was undoubtedly present, the Grange was essentially a protest movement of the pioneering wheat-farming communities against their exploitation by various sections of organized capital—the railroad and elevator companies who fixed charges, the bankers who lent freely in good times and foreclosed in bad times. This aspect of the organization was particularly evident in the Mid-West, in States such as Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota, where the Grange associated itself with a variety of farmers' clubs in forming Independent Parties to fight for greater governmental control of railroad companies, especially in the field of freight charges. Strategies varied: in Missouri the Independent Party joined with the Republicans in opposing a Democratic administration; in Kansas the Independents coalesced with the Democrats to form an 'Independent Reform' Party; in Nebraska they kept apart from both the established parties and remained electorally weak.[10] Although they soon lost ground, the Independent Parties were nevertheless important in that they pioneered many of the organizational and strategic techniques which other farmers' parties were later to apply with greater effect. They also marked the nearest the Grange came to being drawn into party politics; thereafter it retreated further and further into its educational and non-partisan activities.

A general depression in the mid-seventies bred another movement which drew much of its support from the new wheat states. This was the National Greenback Party, organized in 1874-5 by farmers who wished to put pressure on the government to reverse the policy of restoring the greenback dollar after the great crash of 1873. A Greenback candidate contested the 1876 presidential election, but although he received a measure of support from the States of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Iowa and Kansas, he polled less than one per cent of the national vote. In the national elections of 1878 and 1880 the party again put forward candidates, drawing most of its support from the Mid-Western States, but it failed to make much headway and as a result of the run of good crops and high prices in the early eighties it gradually faded away.[11] Whereas the Independents had represented a new form of constructive protest, the Greenbacks had relied to a great extent on the old conspiratorial, single-issue programmes of earlier decades. (Monetary radicalism was a strand in American rural politics which extended back in time well beyond the Civil War and was significant mainly for its reactionary, *poujadiste* aspects.) Yet both movements, paradoxically, were organic expressions of the agrarian outlook.

[9] Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade. A Chronicle of the Farmer in Politics*, p. v. Cf. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform. From Bryan to F.D.R.*, p. 7.

[10] Buck, *Granger Movement*, p. 97.

[11] Buck, *Agrarian Crusade*, pp. 77-98.

The constructive side of agrarian protest found new outlet in a crop of farm organizations which grew up in the old Grange States during the late seventies and the eighties, two of the most influential of these being the National Farmers' Alliance (the 'Northern Alliance') of the Mid-West, and the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union (the 'Southern Alliance') of the South. By 1890 the Northern Alliance was pressing for government ownership of one or more of the transcontinental railways; working with such bodies as the Knights of Labor and some State branches of the Grange, it organized People's Parties in Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas and Minnesota which contested the 1890 state elections with varying success. A national People's Party, formed in 1892, nominated James B. Weaver as its presidential candidate and although Grover Cleveland (Democrat) won the contest with ease, Weaver obtained 22 electoral college votes and polled over 48 per cent of the popular votes in five States. During the campaign, the term 'Populists' came to be applied to members of the People's Party.

From this high point the movement steadily declined. In those States where it had done well, its candidates failed to fulfil the high hopes placed in them, and it compromised its chances in the south by forming alliances with local Republicans. Moreover, against the wishes of the Mid-Western radicals, the national party decided to support the Democratic nominee, William Jennings Bryan, in the 1896 presidential campaign, rather than run its own candidate. Although the 'Middle Roaders'—those of the Populists who wanted the party to resume an independent role—fought hard to reinstate the radical programme of 1892, their efforts were frustrated by the party's amorphous structure, the economic upswing of the late nineties, the decline of the free-silver issue, and the widespread belief that the Democratic Party under Bryan's leadership had taken over the main points of the Populist programme. It was also a fact that, by the turn of the century, some of the most glaring injustices against which the party had been campaigning had been alleviated. The Mid-Western farmers had been protected to some extent against the railroad companies by the Interstate Commerce Act (1887), which required that all charges should be 'just' and 'reasonable' and prohibited various other forms of discrimination. Though an Interstate Commerce Commission appointed to supervise the Act's administration at first lacked both the powers and the inclination to carry out its task, this state of affairs was remedied by the Elkins Act (1903) and the Hepburn Act (1906), by which time court decisions were going strongly against the companies.[12]

In terms of farmer politics, the Populist Parties represented a considerable advance both in organization and programme over the Greenback and Independent Parties of the 1870s. Above all, their internal debates had created a fairly sophisticated awareness of the strategic and doctrinal problems which farmers' parties, particularly if they

[12] The above account is based on Hicks, *Populist Revolt.*

were also third parties, had to face. With their stress on the need for a third party to maintain the movement's independent existence and integrity, the 'Middle Roaders' had raised issues of fundamental importance. Should an agrarian party place more stress on realizing its supporters' demands—at the expense of an alliance, or possible fusion, with an established party—or on maintaining its independence? This was a debate which was to engage the attention of farmers' movements for several decades.

By the turn of the century, the economic and social insecurity which had characterized the pioneering days of the Mid-West was no longer so marked, and the ground had been laid for the growth of permanent, strongly-based, but non-partisan farmers' organizations. In 1902, two important groups came into existence: the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union and the American Society of Equity. Expanding their activities rapidly in a period of increasing prosperity, they concentrated mainly on forming co-operative buying and selling agencies, regulating the flow of produce to markets, and lobbying for concessions.[13] The time was now ripe, also, for the extension of the State's administrative activities into the field of agriculture. Before World War I a start had been made at county level in establishing farm bureaux under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture and in 1919 the new system was integrated under the American Farm Bureau Federation, which devoted itself to lobbying, supplying technical information to farmers, rationalizing certain aspects of produce marketing, and inculcating a business outlook in farmers.[14]

In spite of such achievements, however, something of the old separatist spirit persisted in the Mid-Western States, whose Congressional representatives, most of them Republicans, often voted as a bloc on farm matters during Theodore Roosevelt's presidency (1901-9).[15] The introduction of the Payne-Aldrich Tariff of 1909 induced many farmers to back the Progressive Movement (which was mainly a Republican splinter-group but also included some dissident Democrats) in its support of Roosevelt's unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 1912.[16] Progressivism, as Hofstadter has suggested, was to absorb and trans-

[13] Fred A. Shannon, *American Farmers' Movements* (Princeton, [1957]), pp. 74-6; David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process, Political Interests and Public Opinion*, p. 89.

[14] Grant McConnell, *The Decline of Agrarian Democracy*, pp. 44-54; DeWitt C. Wing, 'Trends in National Farm Organizations', *The Yearbook of Agriculture 1940* (Washington, D.C., 1940), pp. 941-79. See also Orville M. Kile, *The Farm Bureau Movement.*

[15] Amos R. E. Pinchot (*History of the Progressive Party 1912-1916*, ed. Helene Maxwell Hooker, p. 99) noted that the Republican insurgents of this period, most of whose leaders were from the Mid-West (p. 101), acted like the Farm Bloc of the early twenties.

[16] Arthur N. Holcombe, *The Political Parties of To-day, A Study in Republican and Democratic Politics*, pp. 248-78.

mute the Populist tradition and link its values with the reformist principles of the urban middle classes.[17]

These American agrarian movements of the late nineteenth century had a continuous and important effect on rural politics in the Canadian provinces of Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba. The Grange Movement had reached Quebec in 1872, and Ontario in 1874. By 1879 it counted a Canadian membership of 31,000 and was to develop a Grange co-operative company which operated throughout the eighties. Populism also had its Canadian counterpart. The Grand Association of Patrons of Industry, established in Ontario in 1889, mirrored the Populists' interest in third parties and put up teams of candidates to contest the Ontario provincial elections of 1894, the Manitoba elections of 1896, and the federal elections of the same year.[18] However, the high point in Canadian agrarian militancy came after the turn of the century, at a time when agrarian politics in America appeared to be entering a more respectable stage.

The speed with which wheat production had grown in the mid-western prairies had taken almost everyone by surprise, and the Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.) and the grain elevator companies found themselves unable to cope with the harvests. In 1901 and 1902, the growers of Manitoba Province and the North-West Territories suffered great hardship as a result of large quantities of spring wheat remaining inland after winter had set in. They not only blamed the C.P.R. and the dealers for their failure to get the grain away, but accused them of having fixed unfair freight charges and, in the case of the dealers, of having manipulated wheat grades and prices to suit themselves. Further, the farmers alleged that the C.P.R. was working with the grain elevator companies to force small dealers off the market. To represent their demands, they founded Grain Growers' Associations (G.G.As.) in the North-West Territories in the winter of 1901-2 and in Manitoba in 1903. (When the Territories were subdivided to form the Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905, the former organization broke up into the Saskatchewan G.G.A. and the United Farmers of Alberta (U.F.A.), which incorporated several other organizations.)

As their first task, these Associations set themselves to break the hold which the grain elevator companies had established over the wheat handling business. In 1906, E. A. Partridge, one of the leaders of the Territories G.G.A., formed the Grain Growers' Grain Company which, with the aid of the government of Manitoba, eventually forced an entry into the Winnipeg Produce and Grain Exchange, formerly a dealers' stronghold. At the same time, Partridge led a campaign to persuade the provincial governments to establish public ownership of the grain elevator systems, with the result that, in 1909, the Manitoba

[17] Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, pp. 131-4.

[18] Dean E. McHenry, *The Third Force in Canada. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation 1932-1948*, pp. 5-8.

government agreed to establish a line of elevators as a public utility, and the governments of Saskatchewan and Alberta later formed co-operative elevator companies.[19]

Although both the Conservative and Liberal Parties appeared to be firmly based in the prairie provinces, their tariff policies were not popular with the wheatgrowers, and the idea of a separate, low-tariff, farmers' party gained ground in the years immediately preceding World War I. After 1909 when wheat prices had begun to fall on the international market, the tariff issue had become increasingly important in prairie politics. The Conservatives were identified with high tariff views, and the Liberals, who had won the 1896 election on a policy of low tariffs, had not done much to give their policy practical effect. Although the Laurier Liberal government had discussed the case for reduced tariffs with a delegation from the Canadian Council of Agriculture in December 1910, nothing had come of this meeting. However, the Council's demands, known as the 'Farmers' Platform', were endorsed at conventions of the three Grain Growers' Associations early in 1911 and the possibility of forming a separate farmers' party was discussed. The Manitoba G.G.A. took a step in that direction by ruling that all candidates offering themselves in the 1911 election should be asked whether or not they supported the Farmers' Platform.[20] The 1913 convention of the Saskatchewan G.G.A. also considered the idea of a third party, but a resolution aimed at forming one was defeated.[21]

Turning to the Australian scene, we find that until the late eighties the farmers in the wheat belt were too concerned with the politics of land legislation to pay much attention to the problems of distribution and marketing. In New South Wales, Sir John Robertson's Land Acts of 1861, which had been intended to promote closer settlement on the basis of free selection, did not in fact break the pastoralists' hold over some good tracts of agricultural land, particularly in the Riverina and in the Tablelands, and the conditions under which agricultural settlement could proceed relatively unimpeded were not created until after the passing of the Land Acts of 1884 and 1895. Only then did the Farmers and Settlers' Association (F.S.A.), formed in 1893 at the height of one of the land law disputes, turn its attention to problems of grain marketing and distribution. It found them much less formidable than those which faced the farmers' organizations in Canada and the United States. The Australian railways were state-owned; wheat was transported to the port in bags rather than by a bulk-handling and grain-elevator system; and the grain dealers, while not above price manipulation, did not attempt anything like the scale of exploitation

[19] Ibid., pp. 8-11; Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, pp. 38-52; A. W. Currie, *Canadian Economic Development*, pp. 182-5.

[20] W. L. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, pp. 23-4.

[21] Lipset, op. cit., p. 54.

carried out by their American counterparts. It was above all a concern with Australia's high protective tariffs, boosted by the Lyne Tariff of 1908, which caused New South Wales farmers to think seriously of forming their own party. The F.S.A. actually reached the point of running its own candidates in the 1913 State elections, only to find itself incapable of welding the members who were returned into a coherent parliamentary group.

Land legislation lay at the centre of Victorian rural politics for an equally long period, and the passage of legislation to promote closer settlement in 1860, 1865, 1869 and 1878 was accompanied by a great measure of excitement. Indeed, the issues raised by the last Act led to the formation in 1879 of a Victorian Farmers' Union. This gradually faded from the scene, but its place was taken in the late eighties by a Victorian Farmers' Protectionist Association, whose main concern was to obtain protection for several agricultural and pastoral industries. In 1899-1900 a conventional pressure group, the Victorian Chamber of Agriculture, was formed and also began to take an interest in the problems of export marketing, particularly those connected with wheat. Later, in 1913 and 1914, a People's Party (which served as an electoral organization for the Liberal Party and was in no way related to the American Populist movement of the 1890s) talked of forming a farmers' party. In fact, the principle of separate rural representation was not a new one in Victoria; parliamentary country factions of various sizes and degrees of coherence had established a recognized place for themselves in the loose structure of the Victorian party system from the eighties onwards.

Country factions were also a feature of parliamentary politics in other Australian States, especially in Queensland and South Australia, but it was in Western Australia that the first concrete steps were taken to establish a separate farmers' party with an independent electoral organization. The Western Australian Farmers and Settlers' Association, formed in 1912 to combat a move to bring agricultural workers under the jurisdiction of the arbitration courts, was 'captured' by the poor farmers of the State's wheat belt. It nominated its own candidates for the State election of 1914 and returned eight members, who then proceeded to assist the Scaddan Labor government to pass measures for the relief of the drought-stricken wheat farmers. The events in Western Australia were watched intently by farmers in the eastern States, who could at last see somebody doing what they had talked of doing for so long.

It is clear that, from the time of the Populists onwards, Australian farmers had been vitally interested in the agrarian movements of Canada and America. A Queensland Farmers' Alliance, inspired probably by the American models, was formed in September 1891,[22] and

[22] Brisbane *Courier*, 17 Sept. 1891, cited by R. M. Harney, 'The Development of Political Parties in Queensland 1879-1896', B.A. (Honours) Thesis, University of Queensland (copy in possession of author), 1961, p. 128.

recent research into the politics of the Darling Downs during the nineteenth century indicates a strong awareness amongst the settlers there of American developments.[23] The example of the Canadian Grain Growers' Associations was cited by several speakers at the meeting which formed the Western Australian F.S.A., and one of its branches later sent to headquarters a letter and some literature which had been received from them. The F.S.A.'s secretary was then instructed to prepare a digest of this material for circulation to executive members.[24] However, monetary radicalism does not appear to have taken hold in Australian rural politics until the Douglas Credit movement of the depression years; and though Bi-Metallic Leagues dedicated to the restoration of silver as an international currency did exist in Victoria and South Australia in the 1890s,[25] their effect appears to have been limited.

Enough has been said to establish the contrast between the agrarian organizations of Australia and those of North America before World War I. Whereas the latter were aggressive, purposeful and enthusiastic movements, their Australian counterparts operated within narrow limits, usually as conventional pressure groups, and only occasionally considered the idea of forming a separate farmers' party. This difference may be explained in part by the fact that public ownership of the railways and government-controlled rural credit agencies protected new settlers in Australia from the exploitation by business interests to which they were subjected in North America, and by the fact that the energies of farmers in the eastern Australian States were absorbed for so long in a drawn-out fight for land reform which diverted their attention from the less pressing problems of marketing and distribution. There is a further point to be considered here. Whereas the States of the American Mid-West were drawn into the international wheat market in the seventies and eighties when wheat prices were low and for the most part fluctuating, the New South Wales and Victorian wheat industries developed their exports at a time of steadily rising international produce prices. Even then, the Australian wheat belts were not based on single-crop economies: mixed farming was the rule rather than the exception. Regions such as the Wimmera, for example, were producing a wide range of grain crops in the late nineteenth century and most grain farmers also ran small numbers of sheep and cattle. The later relative specialization in wheat growing evolved with the growth of the wheat export trade but not to the point of making wheat

[23] By D. B. Waterson, Lecturer in History, Monash University, Victoria.

[24] Farmers and Settlers' Association of Western Australia, *Executive Minutes*, 3 July, 10 Dec. 1912.

[25] Edmund Jowett, 'The Ruinous Fall in the Prices of Wheat, Wool, &c. The Chief Cause, The Remedy within Reach', Melbourne and Bendigo, [1894].

regions single-crop economies; there were sufficient droughts and price variations to make certain of that. Here then is another reason why agrarian politics in Australia took longer to develop the militancy and fire which characterized the farmers' movements of contemporary America and Canada. However, these contrasts must not lead us to underestimate the link in experience, and the similarities, cultural and political, between the wheat lands of Australia and North America, to which we must now turn.

The Theme of Insecurity in Agrarian Politics

In North America, the instability of the new communities was often a function of the very speed of settlement, which magnified the inevitable problem of adjusting to a new and harsh environment. John Hicks has described how the extension of the railways into the Missouri basin and beyond forced the development of the last frontier at a pace which the settlers could not sustain.

> The various agrarian movements, particularly the Alliance and the Populist revolts, were but the inevitable attempts of a bewildered people to find relief from a state of economic distress made certain by the unprecedented size and suddenness of their assault upon the West and by the finality with which they conquered it.[26]

Agrarian insecurity existed almost to the same extent in Australia, but here it was more frequently a product of the small farmer's experience of harsh treatment at the hands of pastoralists and bankers. Writing of the early days of his district, an old selector recalled bitterly the struggle which wheat farmers had had to establish their communities.

> Before sufficient land was thrown open to attract the settlers to the district, some fine parcels were dummied by the squatters under the same Act to which we were responsible. Neither improvements, residence, nor cultivation conditions had been observed, yet the inspector, or Crown lands bailiff, as he was termed, apparently passed everything and the big holder secured transfers from his dummies. On the other hand, hardly a selector succeeded in evading full compliance with all conditions, and the authorities were most careful that no small man should secure an acre more than he selected. Worse than this, however, was the policy of the financial institutions. Large holders have always been granted loans on leasehold or stock, but the banks would not advance a shilling to a bona fide small holder unless he produced a freehold security. In the dark days that followed, men holding valuable farm blocks for which they could not obtain their title, lived with their children on boiled wheat rather than let go and allow the land for which they had sweated go back to the squatter. Many were ruined before better times came,

[26] Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, p. 2.

> some went to the usurers, and from the usurers to the dogs; others had friends who helped them, and they pulled through somehow.[27]

To the insecurity attached to settlement was added the insecurity of an unstable market situation. Once a wheat industry developed a substantial export trade its economy was exposed to the crippling effects of unpredictable price fluctuations even though its costs were as a rule determined on a protected and expensive local market. As a class farmers were

> *a priori* 'unprotected', the victims of a system of free-trade selling and 'protected' purchasing—in their economic relation as consumers paying heavy prices for high tariff goods, and as producers most of them selling against the competition of the world's markets.[28]

There were, of course, significant variations in this effect. The impact of international price fluctuations was most devastating in economic regions based on a single crop or in those drawn into the international trading system before their settlement problems had been overcome. The new wheat lands of North America, for instance, were based on a one-crop economy and became export regions almost from the time of their first settlement. The social consequences of their economic vulnerability have been noted by Lipset with reference to Saskatchewan:

> The oscillating character of the Saskatchewan economy went far toward preventing the emergence of an integrated, conservative rural society. The farmers continued to be a marginal frontier group in relation to the total society, and developed attitudes characteristic of outcast groups, believing that they did not receive their just or 'parity' share of the national wealth and culture.

A farmer, Lipset suggests, is capable of adjusting himself to a steady income level, even if it is a relatively low one, but income fluctuations disorient and frustrate him by periodically raising and dashing his hopes.[29]

Two points emerge here. One is the contrast between North America's wheat lands and her older agricultural regions further east, where political stability was related to the fact that they had developed a flexible and mixed-crop economy, had accumulated some capital resources, and had produced a more integrated and resilient social structure. The second is the difference between the new wheat regions of North America and those in Australia, for, as already noted, the Australian wheat industry did not become heavily dependent on export earnings

[27] C. J. King, 'An Outline of Closer Settlement in New South Wales, Part I, The Sequence of the Land Laws, 1788-1956', *Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics*, xxv, 3-4, Sept.-Dec. 1957, Appendix vii, p. 275, being an undated extract from the *Sydney Morning Herald, c.* 1904-7.

[28] 'The Vote of the Farm', *Nation*, 50:329, cited by Hicks, op. cit., p. 80.

[29] Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, p. 29.

until after the turn of the century, when international produce prices were steadily rising. South Australia, which exported wheat in quantity from the 1850s, is an exception, but selectors in Victoria and New South Wales were fortunate in having a breathing space between their battle for the land and their involvement in the problems of overseas marketing.[30]

Australian wheatgrowers had their first real taste of international price variations in the five years or so before World War I and it was in these years that the tariff issue and the country party idea came to the forefront in Australian rural politics. From a low point of 2s. 9d. per bushel in 1901, the average Australian export price for wheat had risen to a plateau of 4s. 1d. to 4s. 2d. in the years 1908-10, only to fall to 3s. 6d. in 1911, rise again in 1912, and fall again to 3s. 9d. in 1913. Then came the severe drought of 1914 which cut wheat production from 103 to 25 million bushels and wheat exports from 43 to 4 million bushels.[31] The economic distress produced by this period may be imagined; indebtedness increased and foreclosures crippled the wheat regions. For the first time in twenty years the wheatgrowers experienced an agricultural depression, which although it was a minor one judged by later standards, was all the more disturbing because it was unexpected. Through their pressure groups, farmers redoubled their efforts to secure a reduction in the size of protective tariff barriers and turned seriously to the possibility of independent political action.

The rural communities of the new lands were open and exposed. When disaster came, there was little to cushion its shock; those who could not carry on would pack up and leave or go 'to the usurers, and from the usurers to the dogs'; each settler's homestead was an island, apart and vulnerable, dependent almost entirely on the economic resources of the land and the human resources of the people who worked it. Robert Redfield's account of the coherence and integrity of the 'little community' of the peasant world, the close-knit and homogeneous society of villagers,[32] is the antithesis of the scattered agrarian communities of the new world, which bred a loneliness and cultural poverty so vividly sketched in Australian terms by Patrick White in *The Tree of Man*. The pattern is one of small, harshly functional wooden homesteads scattered across the landscape; of isolation and lack of contact between members of the community; of energies focused on the working of the land; of the absence of tradition and the weakness of shared values. In one of her poems, Judith Wright chose a town dance as a symbol of a rural community's lack of integration, even when its members were celebrating together.

[30] See pp. 31-8.

[31] *Commonwealth Year Books, 1901-10*, p. 370; *1901-14*, p. 314; *Primary Industries, 1956-57. Part I, Rural Industries*, Bulletin No. 51, pp. 29 and 118.

[32] Robert Redfield, *The Little Community* and *Peasant Society and Culture*.

> The dance in the township hall is nearly over.
> Outside in the yard the fire like a great red city
> eats back into the log, its noisy flames fallen.
> Jimmy Dunn has forgotten his camp in the hills
> and sleeps like a heap of rags beside a bottle.
> The young boys sit and stare at the heart of the city
> thinking of the neon lights and the girls at the corners
> with lips like coals and thighs as silver as florins.
> Jock Hamilton thinks of the bally cow gone sick
> and the cockatoos in the corn and the corn ready to pick
> and the wires in the thirty-acre broken.
> Oh, what rats nibble at the cords of our nerves?
> When will the wires break, the ploughed paddocks lie open,
> the bow of the fiddle saw through the breast-bone,
> the dream be done, and we waken?[33]

There are obvious points of comparison between the agrarian communities and the urban *petite bourgeoisie*. Both have a slender hold on their socio-economic status; both are characterized by a loosely-knit social structure and a fiercely-held individualistic ethic; both have a profound respect for law and order; are revolutionary only in extremity; and both in times of stress have recourse to class myths of surprising intensity and power. C. B. Macpherson, in his study of Alberta politics, has compared the economic status of the small farmer to that of the urban *petit bourgeois*. Both are independent to the extent that they can decide what to do with their own labour and capital and both tend to minimize, in good times, the disadvantages under which they labour in a highly competitive and fluctuating market situation.

> Cut off . . . by the scale of his operations and by his independence of employed labour, from the ranks of other entrepreneurs, yet not generally seeing how wide the gulf is between him and them, the farmer is apt to class himself with them, or at least to feel that he has an independent position in the economy akin to theirs. He is confirmed in this belief by his clear perception of his difference from the wage-earner. The wage-earner gives up the direction of his labour; the farmer retains the direction of his, making his own decisions as to how to use his land and capital, his skill and energy. His real independence in comparison with the employee thus confirms him in an illusion that he has or can have an independent place in the economy.[34]

Macpherson then makes the point that the farmers of the Canadian West, like the urban *petite bourgeoisie*, have developed romantic ideas about their class role:

[33] From 'The Blind Man'. *Australian Poets. Judith Wright*, Sydney, 1963, pp. 16-17.

[34] C. B. Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta. The Theory and Practice of a Quasi-Party System*, pp. 222-3.

> it is an agrarian consciousness, not a class consciousness; it emphasizes the common interests of agrarian producers and their difference from all other producers, and in so doing it fails to comprehend the essential class position of the independent producers, that is, their ambiguous position in an economy increasingly dominated by capital.[35]

Agrarian myths are usually based, however, on a social theory in which classes are seen not as horizontal strata in a hierarchical society, but as independent groups of producers and entrepreneurs, separated from each other by vertical cleavages; for the farmer tends to think of class both as a socio-economic group, distinguished by its relation to a particular primary industry, and as a regional community. Thus an agrarian political movement usually presents two aspects; from one point of view it appears as a class demand for socio-economic concessions and for privilege; from another it represents the protest of a colonial region against metropolitan dominance, economic and political. The regional element may in fact predominate, especially if the region in question is economically and culturally homogeneous and if its country towns are reasonably sympathetic towards agrarian protest. In such cases the political conflict is usually expressed in terms of the country versus the city and its temper may become conservative, even reactionary. Where, on the other hand, the socio-economic element is uppermost, agrarian movements tend to assume a more radical style, and to present the essential conflict as that between the farmers and their sectional enemies, businessmen, railroad companies, bankers, big landholders and, sometimes, trade unionists. In this case the economic objectives will have a radical flavour, particularly if they include demands for the extension of state activity, such as the public control and regulation of the railways or of the produce marketing system.

Some observers, including Lipset, have detected in such radicalism the presence of Socialist principles,[36] but Socialism in agrarian politics has seldom meant any more than Socialism for the sole benefit of farmers. Agrarian radicals have demanded state intervention to improve the trading position of rural interests in a free enterprise economy, even if this intervention meant public control of the railways, grain handling agencies and banks, and they have been prepared, in achieving their objects, to form alliances with trade unions or Socialist parties, but such alliances have seldom if ever marked the acceptance of Socialist doctrines or working-class causes by the farmers concerned. There have been cases, such as those noted by Lipset in Canada, where former

[35] Ibid., p. 227. Macpherson's theory was criticized by S. M. Lipset in the *Canadian Forum*, Toronto, XXXIV, 406, Nov. 1954, pp. 175-7; 407, Dec. 1954, pp. 196-8. In his reply (ibid., 408, Jan. 1955, pp. 223-5), Macpherson reiterated his view 'that the class with which I was most concerned is practically incapable of recognizing its class position' (p. 224).

[36] Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, pp. 18, 74, 152.

Socialists or Labour leaders have risen to the leadership of militant agrarian movements[37]—yet here again their doctrinal influence appears to have been limited. Basically, the farmer's social ethic is individualist rather than collectivist. In his dream of success, the small settler of humble origins breaks in the land, wrests a living from it and finally 'makes good', becoming in the end a gentleman farmer or, perhaps, a wealthy countryman living in urban retirement. When his world is not out of joint, his great desire is to give it permanence and order, to give himself and his family the security of convention. Veblen saw the farmer as

> an obstinately loyal supporter of the system of law and custom which so makes the conditions of life for him.
>
> His unwavering loyalty to the system is in part a holdover from that obsolete past when he was the Independent Farmer of the poets; but in part it is also due to the still surviving persuasion that he is on the way, by hard work and shrewd management, to acquire a 'competence'; such as will enable him some day to take his due place among the absentee owners of the land and so come in for an easy livelihood at the cost of the rest of the community; and in part it is also due to the persistent though fantastic opinion that his own present interest is tied up with the system of absentee ownership, in that he is himself an absentee owner by so much as he owns land and equipment which he works with hired help, —always presuming that he is such an owner in effect or prospect.[38]

It is important to see the farmer's drive for economic security as being also a drive for social status or for 'social honor', to use Weber's term.[39] If a farmer's condition becomes stable he will accept his condition and his desire for success will become part of a fantasy world; but if disaster overtakes his material world his reaction will be doubly intense. His concern for political action may then become total and all-absorbing, with the result that movements of agrarian protest may generate tremendous power within the space of months or even weeks, just as they may lose that power if prosperity or an appearance of normality is restored. Yet even in protest, the farmer's faith in the importance of the legal order will prevent him from becoming a revolutionary. He will ask the state to restore order and his chances of success but he will not ask it to change the essential form of the economy. Monetary radicalism, for example, appeals to the farmer as a way of reform which will produce the maximum effect with the minimum of structural changes.

Economic uncertainty heightened the farmer's belief that politics

[37] Ibid., p. 25.

[38] Thorstein Veblen, *Absentee Ownership and Business Enterprise in Recent Times, The Case of America*, p. 130, cited in Lipset, op. cit., p. 17.

[39] *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, p. 181.

were essentially a struggle between different classes of producers and entrepreneurs, and one in which farmers were poorly equipped to engage. A Manitoban agrarian leader complained in 1916 that

> farmers as a class have not in the past, and do not even now readily develop the spirit of class consciousness. . . . All other classes, as a result of their combination, and because of the fact that they place class interests above political preferment, are able to wield influence in the halls of our legislatures. We pass resolutions, divide our influence along party political lines and so weaken our case politically that in the great game of party politics we play little or no part. The banker, the manufacturer, the railway interests, when they have personal interests to serve know no politics. With them, business is their politics. Until we learn that lesson—further, until we go home and practise that lesson—we need not hope or expect to succeed in bringing to rural life that consideration which it merits.[40]

In other words, to succeed in politics farmers needed to develop a feeling of class solidarity, an awareness of the true interests of their class, and a determination to use whatever political methods were best suited for furthering those interests.

As we have seen, the early agrarian movements lacked staying power; no sooner had they made their initial impact in the political system than they would lose direction and go to pieces. Their failure was in part one of organization and of leadership, but it was also a reflection of their doctrinal weakness. Agrarian leaders of the calibre of Henry Wise Wood of Alberta were the exceptions; for the most part, the low level of education amongst farmers and their poor access to information meant that their political and economic ideas were unsophisticated and unsystematic, with the result that their action was ill-directed and, with certain exceptions, not nearly as effective as it might have been. They found it easy to believe that their economic distress and their political frustration were the result of a deliberate financial conspiracy on the part of eastern bankers and businessmen; they were like people 'so completely shut out from access to the centers of power that they feel themselves completely deprived of self-defense and subjected to unlimited manipulation by those who wield power'.[41]

Doctrinal weakness increased the power of myth in agrarian society. Unable to comprehend the complex machinery of the economic system which appeared to be working against him, the farmer would focus on symbols of his oppression—the railways, the banks, the grain elevator companies—and fight to break them. In the United States, the railways were a particular object of hatred; their manipulation of freight charges, their alliance with the grain merchants, their speculation in

[40] *The Grain Growers' Guide*, 12 Jan. 1916, cited in Morton, *The Progressive Party*, pp. 41-2.

[41] Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, p. 71.

land were blatant, and their intervention in State politics was well known. The role played by the Santa Fe railroad company in Kansas and by the Burlington and Union Pacific in Nebraska was particularly notorious.[42] The Independent Parties and the Populists made the railroad companies their principal target but the support which these parties received from the mass of farmers was anti-monopoly rather than anti-capitalist, radical rather than socialist, and it fell away once the most glaring abuses had been remedied. Indeed, the very intensity with which farmers focused their hatred on the railroads, for example, blinded them to the other economic problems which they faced as an underprivileged group in a complex industrialized economy. Something of that intensity was captured by Frank Norris in his 'muckraking' novel, *The Octopus*, published in 1901. One of the sympathetic characters, Presley, has just seen the slaughter of several sheep by a locomotive of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad:

> abruptly Presley saw again, in his imagination, the galloping monster, the terror of steel and steam, with its single eye, Cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon; but saw it now as the symbol of a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path; the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus.[43]

Before farmers' organizations could hope to achieve much success, farmers had to be taught to see beyond such immediate symbols to the underlying economic system, and to realize that their political struggle might be a long and complicated one. The importance of the Canadian Grain Growers' Associations lies very largely in the fact that they were able to build up an informed rank and file membership, a flexible and stable organization, and a coherent doctrine, in all of which respects they marked a distinct advance on the organizations which had preceded them, both in Canada and America. In tracing the early history of the Saskatchewan G.G.A., Lipset has shown how its long drawn out legal and political battles with the grain elevator companies, the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Winnipeg Grain Exchange brought into being a 'class consciousness' amongst its membership. It is especially interesting to note the role E. A. Partridge played in investigating the structure of the Winnipeg grain trade, forming a co-operative grain company, obtaining its admission to the Winnipeg Exchange and then agitating for a system of state-controlled grain elevators. In 1908 his company launched the *Grain Growers' Guide*, a journal which became the forum of doctrinal debate inside the Canadian movement; as early as 1911, for example, it was advocating the formation of a third party and was discussing the strategic and policy prob-

[42] Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, pp. 69-71.

[43] Frank Norris, *The Octopus. A Story of California*, pp. 32-3.

lems which such a party would face.[44] This approach was to prepare the ground for successful agrarian action in the post-war period.

The third party idea was the most significant outcome of the agrarian protest movements of the new lands. Just as the spontaneity, the sudden bursts of enthusiasm and the sudden fading-away of these movements linked them to the peasant *jacqueries* of the old world, so the evolution in their organizational ideas, policies and strategies led on to the farmers' parties which emerged during and after World War I in Canada, America and Australia. Although the American Independent Parties of the early seventies were the precursors of the third party idea, it was the Middle Roaders of the Populist era who first gave serious attention to the problems involved in third party action. The history of their own movement pointed the moral; as pressure groups in the eighties, the Alliance organizations had not made the gains expected. Some of them had tried, by taking part in election campaigns, to build up rural factions within the established Democratic and Republican Parties, but the results had been unsatisfactory. The next stage had been the formation of various parliamentary People's Parties in the early nineties, but these too had failed because they had become embroiled with the older parties, had compromised their policies for the sake of office, and had not consolidated their electoral support. The Canadian agrarian leaders took over where the Middle Roaders had left off, with this important difference—they realized that unless a farmers' party entered Parliament with clearly established principles of action and policy, in other words, with an effective doctrine, it would surely founder once its immediate objectives had been attained.

Before 1914, then, the third-party idea had taken shape. Its essential points were that a farmers' party should preserve its integrity as an electoral and parliamentary force, should avoid alliances with established parties wherever possible, should maintain firm organizational links with its mass following, and should act in accordance with its doctrine. Its advocates saw in the idea of a separate farmers' party a political form which would stand up to the demands of sustained action and yet retain its rural identity; for in a real sense it was intended not only to obtain material benefits for its supporters but also to assert rural values in an urban parliament. By providing a party which was to be a testimony to its members' pride of class, it was to prevent happening what had so often happened before—the transformation of the farmers' representative from a 'son of the soil' into a 'city slicker'.

> If the farmer went to the capital fresh from the plow, among a crowd of lobbyists, he was as clay in the hands of the potter. If his constituents kept him there year after year, until he learned the ways of legislation, then he ceased to be a farmer and became a member of

[44] Lipset, op. cit., pp. 41-7, 54.

some other class, perhaps a stockholder in a great railroad, or manufacturing corporation, with interests in common with the opponents of agricultural classes.[45]

The Rise of the Third Parties

As a result of the heavy demand for wheat created by the 1914-18 War, the agricultural regions of the new lands found themselves gaining unexpected prosperity. Wheat production in the U.S.A., Canada and Australia combined rose from 982 million bushels in the 1909-14 quinquennium to 1,170·3 million bushels in 1914-19,[46] and prices soared to almost twice their pre-war levels. The problems of encouraging a high rate of production and of transporting the crop to Europe despite shipping shortages obliged the governments of these countries to intervene in the wheat industry's affairs to an extent which would not have been contemplated before the war. In 1918 the United States government guaranteed the price of wheat at $2 a bushel, and although this led to a two-fifths increase in production there was no difficulty in selling the whole crop.[47] In Canada the government appointed a Board of Grain Supervisors to handle the 1917 and 1918 crops and, after pressure from farmers' organizations, a Canadian Wheat Board to deal with the 1919 crop.[48] An Australian Wheat Board, with subsidiary boards in the wheat growing States, was in operation between 1915 and 1921. Both in Australia and in Canada, the wartime experiments of the Wheat Boards stimulated a demand for some form of post-war marketing control, and in each country efforts were made to establish voluntary co-operative wheat pools backed by state financial assistance. This demand received an added stimulus from the sharp recession of 1920-1. Its effect was most severe in the United States where, on 31 May 1920, the government subsidy was removed and prices dropped alarmingly. The previous boom had led to an inflation of land values and over-expenditure on farm machinery; from 3,320 million dollars in 1910, the farm mortgage debt had risen to 7,858 million in 1920, reaching over 9,000 million dollars in the course of the recession,[49] and resulting in bankruptcies, foreclosures and distress. In Canada, the ending of control at the end of the 1920 season ushered in a similar crisis;[50] in Australia, where the wartime scheme continued into 1921, the reaction was much milder.

[45] C. S. Walker, 'The Farmers' Movement', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 4: 790-8, March 1894, pp. 795-6, cited in Hicks, op. cit., p. 151.

[46] Malenbaum, *World Wheat Economy*, p. 239.

[47] Shannon, *American Farmers' Movements*, pp. 83-4.

[48] Morton, *The Progressive Party*, pp. 108-9.

[49] Joseph S. Davis, 'Planned Agricultural Adjustment in the United States, 1933-1934', *Commodity Control in the Pacific Area. A Symposium on Recent Experience*, ed. W. L. Holland (London, 1935), p. 18.

[50] Currie, *Canadian Economic Development*, pp. 185-6.

From this low point wheat prices recovered gradually until the mid-twenties, after which they levelled off and, towards the end of the decade, began falling once more. The danger was now over-production. The growth in the size of the new world crops had compensated for the decline in European and Russian wheat production during the war and in the early post-war years, but by the late twenties European wheat production was coming back into its own and there was a real danger of a glut on the market accompanied by a catastrophic price decline. The ultimate result was to be the International Wheat Agreement of 1933, by which a system of export quotas was instituted, but in the twenties there appeared to be no means of averting the impending crisis and a new urgency seized agrarian politics. In America, the Farm Bureau's persistent campaign for a government guarantee for farm-produce prices was met by the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929, which established a Federal Farm Board with powers to control agricultural surpluses and regulate internal commodity prices.[51] Meanwhile, the Canadian wheat provinces had become attached to the voluntary contract pool idea pioneered in America; growers were required to sign a five-year contract assigning their wheat to co-operative marketing pools, which were established in Alberta in 1923 and in Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 1924, their selling operations being co-ordinated through a central agency. By their second season the pools were handling over half the Canadian crop but they failed to increase this proportion and ran into serious financial difficulties during the depression. When the government established a public wheat board in 1935, the co-operatives restricted themselves to operating their elevator chains.[52] In Australia during 1921 and 1922, voluntary pools functioning on a yearly basis were established in the major wheatgrowing States, although compulsory pooling was continued in Queensland. Only in Western Australia did the voluntary principle prove at all successful; most of the eastern experiments, despite their attempts to introduce the contract system, were languishing by the end of the decade, by which time the demand for the restoration of compulsory, government-backed pools on the wartime model was being strongly pressed by many farmers' organizations. By this time too, Australian farmers were becoming increasingly critical of the government's policy of tariff protection.

This is the background against which the agrarian third party movements of World War I and the twenties must be seen. Their militant traditions and the continued insecurity of their industry made the wheat farmers of the new lands the most active group within the American Non Partisan League, the Canadian Progressive Party and the Australian Country Party. Other groups were prominently associ-

[51] E. S. Haskell, 'Stabilization Operations of the Federal Farm Board' *Commodity Control in the Pacific Area*, pp. 90-124.

[52] Harold S. Patton, 'The Canadian Wheat Pool in Prosperity and Depression', ibid., pp. 125-56; Currie, op. cit., pp. 186-90.

ated with all these movements but their basic impetus and above all their organizational ideas came from the wheat farmers.

The formation of the Farmers' Non Partisan Political League of North Dakota in 1915 signalled a return to the old third-party idea of the Independent and Populist Parties. In fact, it is correct to see the League more as the product of pre-war conditions than as a response to the wartime situation. Led by Arthur C. Townley, it centred its attack on a small group of North Dakota grain dealers, merchants and railroad companies which had established virtual commercial and economic control of the State. The League dominated the 1918 election and in the following year put through a full-blooded reform programme, including the formation of a state bank, a public elevator company and a home-building association. In a few years Leagues had been established in fifteen other States throughout the Middle West,[53] and the organization might well have become a national party of consequence had it been able to represent the discontent produced by the severe 1920-2 agricultural recession. Here, however, the Farm Bureau took the initiative and organized a small group of Congressmen into a Farm Bloc which drew members from both the major parties and voted as a unit on issues affecting agricultural interests during the 1921-3 period. It was responsible for obtaining tariffs against the importation of European food and machinery, for reviving the War Finance Corporation to sell surplus agricultural production, and for legislation which enlarged the federal land banks and strengthened the Grain Futures Act. The return of good prices in 1924 and 1925 coincided with the Bloc's demise; it was not reconstituted after the 1924 elections.[54]

Robert La Follette's candidacy for the presidency in the 1924 campaign marked one of the last outbursts of agrarian separatism in American politics. In 1922 the already declining Non Partisan League gave its support to a Conference for Progressive Political Action (C.P.P.A.), which also had the backing of such bodies as the American Federation of Labor, the Socialist Party, the Farmers' Union and the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota. In July 1924 the Progressives, as the supporters of the Conference were called, decided to back La Follette as an Independent candidate for the 1924 campaign. Although by advocating a policy of anti-monopoly legislation, tariff reductions, and credit reforms La Follette polled well in those Mid-Western States where the Non Partisan League had been most active, he lost the election and the union organizations withdrew their support from the C.P.P.A., which went out of existence in February 1925.[55]

[53] Shannon, op. cit., pp. 77-82. See also Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922.*

[54] McConnell, *Decline of Agrarian Democracy*, pp. 57-9; Shannon, op. cit., pp. 85-7.

[55] Howard P. Nash, Jr, *Third Parties in American Politics*, pp. 273-88; Kenneth C. Mackay, *The Progressive Movement of 1924.*

The decline of the Non Partisan League and the defeat of La Follette epitomized the problems which an agrarian third party movement faced in American politics. A third party could not expect to survive permanently as a minor party based on a regional support in a system in which so much power was vested in the office of President. Its only chance of success was to emulate the feat of the Republican Party of the 1850s by arranging sufficient sectional alliances to rise from minor to major party status in the space of the decade. The Populist Party with its strong southern wing had almost made such a breakthrough in 1892 but the Non Partisan League, anchored to small States with a reputation for electoral inconsistency, had not stood a hope. La Follette's candidature was little more than a gesture. By the twenties agrarian issues were not local but national in character, as was borne out strikingly by the enthusiasm which the Farm Bureau's campaign for stabilized commodity prices had aroused. Townley's campaign against the business bosses of North Dakota preserved a little longer the illusion that State politics was a world of its own.[56] The subsequent decline of the League was also due to the old weaknesses—a lack of doctrine, an absence of organizational flexibility, and the desertion of followers.

In Canada, the increases in farm costs during the latter years of the war had led to a revival of the tariff issue in the Prairie Provinces,[57] thus weakening further the Conservative-Liberal alliance on which the wartime coalition had been based. In 1919 it seemed likely that the two traditional parties would soon resume their separate ways, with the federal Liberal Party reviving its former low-tariff policy and thereby strengthening the position of the provincial Liberal governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In fact, however, this was not to happen: the Liberal Convention of August 1919 did endorse the tariff demands made by the Canadian Council of Agriculture in its New Nation Policy, but it did not condemn protectionism as a principle, and western agrarian leaders decided to take concrete steps to form a third party committed to low-tariff ideals. A convention which met at Winnipeg in November 1919 resolved to nominate farmers' candidates for the next federal elections and in February 1920 eleven western members of the House of Commons at Ottawa formed a National Progressive Party. T. A. Crerar, who had been Minister of Agriculture in the coalition cabinet but had resigned in 1919 over the tariff issue, was chosen as their leader. In the 1921 elections, Progressive candidates were nominated in most provinces and sixty-five were elected to the 235-member House, the party gaining a national vote of 23·1 per cent[58] and polling heavily in all the prairie provinces, where the

[56] See Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, p. 16.

[57] The following account is based on Morton, op. cit., chs. 2-8.

[58] All the election figures cited in these paragraphs are from Howard A. Scarrow, *Canada Votes, A Handbook of Federal and Provincial Election Data.*

demand for tariff revision was now coupled with that for the formation of a government-controlled wheat marketing organization.

Nevertheless, success had come too easily to the Progressives, who immediately found themselves in disagreement over the organizational and strategic proposals which were put forward. The debate started when W. L. Mackenzie King, the Liberal leader, invited Crerar to join the Liberals (who were short of a majority by one seat) in forming a coalition. Scarcely had the majority of the Progressives, after consultation with representatives of the farmers' organizations, decided that the party should accept some cabinet places in return for giving the Liberals conditional support, than King changed his mind and withdrew the coalition offer. As a result, the Progressives sat through the term on the corner benches, from where they accorded the Liberals erratic support for a steady trickle of concessions, while all the time their electoral support was draining away. With the return of good prices in the mid-twenties the tariff issue receded in importance and with the formation of the voluntary contract pools the sting was taken out of the demand for compulsory marketing. The wave of enthusiasm which had floated the Progressive Party to success in 1921 now fell back, except in Alberta. Crerar was succeeded by Robert Forke as leader of the federal party in November 1922 but the latter did nothing to remedy the situation, which deteriorated even further after the Council of Agriculture withdrew its support from the party in March 1923.

The disagreement over organizational principles had been fundamental. Crerar and later Forke had represented the majority opinion that the party should aim at becoming a broad national force, drawing support from as many socio-economic groups as possible, and should therefore avoid identifying itself too closely with the agrarian interest. Less overtly, they were also suggesting that the Progressive Party should follow the example of the traditional parties by leaving decisions about strategies and detailed policies to the parliamentary leadership and restricting its electoral organization to administrative and campaign tasks. Against this group, which became known as the 'Manitoban Progressives', stood the 'Albertan Progressives' led by Henry Wise Wood of Alberta, who argued that the Progressive Party would survive only if it became a farmers' party and admitted the principle of control of the parliamentary group by the extra-parliamentary organization. Wood and his followers wanted the Progressive Party to be a new kind of party, freely acknowledging its group basis and its agrarian identity. In August 1922, Wood pointed out at a meeting of the Council of Agriculture 'that there were two ideas, the Group idea and the Party idea, and that Farmers' organizations in the past had met calamity when they had adopted the Party idea in politics'.[59] The same theme

[59] Minutes of Canadian Council of Agriculture, 1 Aug. 1922, p. 158, cited in Morton, op. cit., p. 174.

was taken up in a letter published by a group of Albertans who broke away from the federal Progressive Party in July 1924:

> As we see it there are two species of political organization—one the 'Political Party' that aspires to power, and in so doing inevitably perpetuates that competitive spirit in matters of legislation and government generally which has brought the world wellnigh to ruin; the other is the democratically organized group which aims to co-operate with other groups to secure justice rather than to compete with them for power. It is as representatives of this latter type that we take our stand . . .[60]

A choice between two strategies was offered. If the Progressives wished to become a broad-based, national party, as undoubtedly Crerar and Forke hoped that they would, they had to cast loose from their agrarian moorings and make an all-out bid to displace one of the other parties from its main bases of power; for as long as they remained small and lacked an effective organization, there was a great danger of their being absorbed in, or broken by, the Liberals, the major party with which they had most in common. If, however, they wished to function as an agrarian party, they had to reconcile themselves to remaining a small group relying on well-organized regional and sectional support.

The 1925 election campaign found the Progressives still undecided, and when the results were known they discovered that they had left the decision too late: their parliamentary numbers had been reduced from 65 to 24 and their share of the national vote from 23·1 to 9·0 per cent. Worse followed. Mackenzie King, with a party of 99 members compared with the Conservative Party's 116, attempted to keep a Liberal government in power by relying on Progressive support. He succeeded until June 1926, when the Progressives seemed likely to vote with a Conservative censure motion criticizing the administration of the Customs Department, and he decided to seek a dissolution. In this he was unsuccessful, and a Conservative caretaker government took office, only to be dissolved in July when the Progressives refused to work with it. By this time the Progressive Party had lost all its original impulse and in the elections which followed its strength was reduced to 20 seats and its share of the vote to 5·3 per cent. Although it lingered on until the early thirties, it was obviously a spent force.

Its failure has been explained on several grounds—the reluctance of its members to accept caucus discipline, the decline of agrarian discontent in the mid-twenties, the party's inability to represent a wide range of regional and sectional interests—but the real reasons were those mentioned by William Irvine in a report on the party prepared in 1941, namely its lack of organization and its members' low standard of education.[61] The only way in which the party could have ensured

[60] *The U.F.A.*, 2 July 1924, cited in Morton, op. cit., p. 195.

[61] Report of Organized (Edmonton: Alberta Provincial C.C.F., 1941), p. 9, cited in McHenry, *Third Force in Canada*, p. 16.

that the decline in enthusiasm did not lead to a loss of power would have been to build up a firmly-grounded organization and an informed rank and file, conditions which were met only in Alberta. During the war the United Farmers of Alberta (U.F.A.) had come increasingly under the influence of Henry Wise Wood, who had at first opposed the idea of forming a separate party but, once persuaded that this was desirable, had insisted that the parliamentary party should be responsible to the outside organization and that the party should act in politics according to a definite doctrine. Under Wood's direction, U.F.A. won the provincial election of July 1921 and went on to win those of 1926 and 1930 by large majorities, holding office until 1935, when it was displaced by a Social Credit Party.[62]

The key to U.F.A.'s success lay partly in the appeal of its leadership and the energy of its administration and partly in its organization. At the base of the organization were the locals, or branches, which elected their own executives and delegates to the U.F.A. governing body, the annual convention held in January each year to elect the board of directors and the executive and to discuss policy matters. The relationship between the locals and the convention, and between the convention and the executive bodies, was a two-way one.

> The officers were regarded as delegates of the convention, and many resolutions passed by the convention were instructions to the board or executive, just as the delegates to the convention had in many cases been instructed by their locals on specific issues.[63]

By contrast, the United Farmers of Manitoba (U.F.M.), which won the provincial election of July 1922 and formed an administration which lasted out the decade, failed to keep its organization functioning effectively, and lost heavily to the established parties in the federal election.[64] In further contrast to U.F.A. stands the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (S.G.G.A.), which by the early twenties was dominated by a conservative oligarchy, whose members opposed the third party idea and accepted places in the provincial Liberal government. When in 1922 a former S.G.G.A. leader, Charles A. Dunning, became Premier of the Liberal administration, the Saskatchewan advocates of an agrarian third party began an uphill fight. Their first victory came in 1921 with the formation of the Farmers' Union, which fought for a wheat pool until one was established in 1924. Then, in 1926, the Farmers' Union and the S.G.G.A. joined to form the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) on terms which favoured the radicals, and steps were taken to prevent farmers' leaders from joining Liberal cabinets. George Williams, the new organization's first

[62] Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta*, chs. 2 and 3; Morton, op. cit., pp. 87-9, 97, 216-25.

[63] Macpherson, op. cit., p. 63.

[64] Morton, op. cit., pp. 226-31.

president, pressed it to form a third party but nothing was done until the formation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in 1932.[65]

The extent to which Progressive voting strength was maintained in Alberta while it declined in Manitoba and Saskatchewan is brought out clearly in the accompanying table, which compares the proportions of votes polled by Progressive candidates in those Provinces in federal elections between 1921 and 1930.

The Progressive Vote in the Prairie Provinces, 1921-30[66]

Election Year	*1921*	*1925*	*1926*	*1930*
Alberta	56·8	31·5	38·7	30·4
Saskatchewan	61·0	31·8	15·6	12·4
Manitoba	43·7	27·1	11·2	4·0

The U.F.A.'s major achievement was the organization and indoctrination of an agrarian mass support within the framework of a class party, an achievement which gave further substance to the agrarian third party idea inherited from the Non Partisan League and the Populists.

As in Canada and America, so in Australia it was the wheat farmers and their organizations which formed the spearhead of the third-party movement. The creation of the Australian wheat pool in 1915 provided the initial stimulus. When the pool was first brought into operation, the wheat farmers' reaction was one of hostility towards government interference. Politically, their first impulse was to come to grips with the pool's administration and to press their complaints about inefficient accounting and handling methods. However, by 1917 many farmers had come to value the pool as a marketing agency and from this time onwards the demand for increased grower control of the Australian and State Wheat Boards was linked with the demand that the scheme should be continued after the war. With varying degrees of enthusiasm, organizations such as the Farmers and Settlers' Associations of New South Wales, Western Australia and South Australia, and the Farmers' Unions of Queensland and Victoria were drawn into party politics to represent these demands and, in some cases, to press for a reduction of protective tariffs. The Victorian Farmers' Union (V.F.U.), almost entirely a wheat farmers' association, was particularly militant; it fought the State election of November 1917 and subsequently formed a small parliamentary party; in May 1918 it obtained a promise from the federal government that preferential voting would be adopted for elections to the House of Representatives; in December 1918 it returned the first Country Party member to the Federal Parliament at the Corangamite by-election.

The emphasis placed on the political role of the wheat farmers in this analysis is deliberate, for their social and economic insecurity, and their 'colonial mentality' as regional groups, seem to have predisposed

[65] Lipset, op. cit., pp. 57-67, 73-9.

[66] Based on figures taken from Scarrow, op. cit., pp. 35, 49, 63, 77.

them to the formation of separatist movements and, in certain cases, agrarian political parties. Other rural sections were also attracted to the third party idea, but it held much more appeal to the wheat farmer; he had to cope with one of the most unpredictable and fluctuating international commodity markets, his economic situation was essentially unstable, and he was particularly vulnerable to exploitation by financial and entrepreneurial interests. In Australia it was the wheat farmers' organizations which initiated the country party movement and it was they which pressed it most strongly in the period 1917-20. However, during these years several other rural sections, such as small graziers and dairy farmers, were drawn into the movement. Their reasons for accepting the country party idea varied. The dairy farmers wanted the new parties to protest against the price-fixing and marketing controls associated with the wartime butter and cheese pooling schemes, for unlike many wheat farmers they were not attracted to the principle of state-controlled marketing agencies; graziers saw the country parties as a convenient means of protesting against the regulation of meat prices in 1918 and against the tariff increases which were canvassed in 1919. Besides, organizations such as the United Graziers' Association of Queensland regarded the country parties as a further instrument to use in their battle against the Labor Party, for along with the established farmers of the older agricultural regions, they were disturbed at what they took to be the radical policies of the federal National Government led by W. M. Hughes. They therefore wanted the country party movement to adopt a conservative policy as a means either of bringing Hughes to his senses or at least obliging him to alter his programme.

Consequently, what had begun largely as a wheat farmers' affair became a broad-based country movement, and when the country parties were established in Parliament they represented a wide range of interests. The V.F.U. Party, for example, found itself after the 1920 State election supported by pastoral, dairying and fruit-growing as well as wheat-farming constituencies; the New South Wales Progressive Party, formed in 1920, drew part of its backing from the wheat and mixed-farming regions of the Riverina and the Tablelands, another part from northern pastoral and dairying regions, and another from suburban electorates in Sydney; the members constituting the Federal Country Party, also formed in 1920, represented an even larger number of interests, including cane growers.

The fortunes of the North American agrarian movements, particularly those of the Canadian Grain Growers' Associations, continued to be closely studied in Australia. In reply to a letter he had written to the *Grain Growers' Guide*, for example, the secretary of the V.F.U. received a long letter outlining the formation and history of the Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba organizations and their interest in third party politics. The letter was published in the V.F.U.'s journal, the *Farmers' Advocate*, with the comment, 'It will be noted how

similar are the conditions in Australia and in Canada in connection with the distribution of wheat crops, co-operation, and to some extent politics. . . .'[67] In February 1918 the same journal reprinted in full the policy statement issued by the Canadian Council of Agriculture and noted that it had been endorsed by the farmers' organizations of the Prairie Provinces.[68] H. P. Williams, who later became Secretary of the New South Wales Progressive Party, visited Canada in 1919 and wrote an article highlighting the third party movement which was published in *Land*, a New South Wales periodical, and reprinted in the *Advocate*.[69] The Victorian journal followed each stage in the formation of the Progressive Party and reported fully on its good showing in the Canadian election of 1921.[70] The flow of information from Canada to the Australian farmers' organizations appears to have been continuous and detailed, and there was also a lively Australian interest in the American Non Partisan Leagues.[71] In the early years of the Australian movement, Country Party leaders were keenly aware of their kinship with the Canadian and American parties and were often guided by their experience.[72]

The crises of strategy which the Australian Country Parties encountered in the period 1920-3 are strikingly similar to those which plagued and ultimately broke the Canadian Progressive Party. Most of the parliamentary Country Parties in Australia tried in the first instance to employ a balance-of-power, or conditional-support strategy, which meant in effect that they would back governments in return for concessions. The complicating factor was their close ideological affinity with the conservative National Parties, which, like the Canadian Liberals in the case of the Progressives, began taking their support for granted. Only the Victorian party seriously explored the possibility of working with the Labor Party and in doing so it created serious tensions within its membership. Conscious of these difficulties, the leaders of the various Country Parties began feeling their way towards an alternative strategy, that of forming coalitions and electoral alliances with the Nationalists, which they argued could be carried into effect without leading to the absorption or disappearance of the Country

[67] *Farmers' Advocate* (Melbourne), 30 Nov. 1917.

[68] Ibid., 1 Feb. 1918.

[69] Ibid., 21 Aug. 1919.

[70] Ibid., 15 Dec. 1921. Reporting on Canadian rural politics was just as full in other States, e.g. *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin* (Adelaide), Dec. 1920, pp. 699-700; Jan. 1922, pp. 187-9; May 1922, pp. 11-12; *Producers' Review* (Toowoomba), 10 Aug. 1919, p. 13; 10 Aug. 1920, p. 10; 'Farmers' and Settlers' Gazette' of the *Sunday Times* (Perth), 14 and 21 Feb. 1915; *Primary Producer* (Perth), 23 Sept. 1921.

[71] See, for example, *Farmers' Advocate*, 11 May 1917; 15 Mar. 1918; 22 Mar. 1918; *Producers' Review*, 10 Nov. 1915, p. 17; 10 June 1917, pp. 3-4; *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin*, Nov. 1921, pp. 158-9.

[72] E.g. Dr Earle Page, *C.P.D.*, vol. 97, 27 Oct. 1921, p. 12, 226.

Parties. A version of the coalition strategy had been tried by the Western Australian Country Party as early as 1917, but it only acquired respectability in February 1923, when Dr Earle Page, the leader of the Federal Country Party, negotiated a coalition agreement with the Federal National Party and a composite ministry was formed with S. M. Bruce as Prime Minister. An electoral pact was arranged between the federal parties in the following year, and by the end of the decade all the Country Parties, with the exception of the Victorian one, had adopted the coalition strategy in its essentials.

By the end of the twenties, also, country parties had become firmly established in federal politics and in the States of New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia and weaker ones were still maintaining a precarious existence in Queensland and South Australia. This is an achievement which deserves attention, especially when contrasted with the early collapse of such parties in Canada and the United States. Further reference will be made to this contrast in the concluding chapter, but the main interest in the sections following must be in the circumstances which gave rise to the Australian parties and enabled them to persist.

2

Origins

The Conditions of Agrarian Separatism

The intense class feeling which informed agrarian politics during the formation of the country parties had arisen during the early troubles of the wheat industry. Politically and economically, the history of Australian agriculture between the gold rushes of the 1850s and the outbreak of World War I can be divided into two broad periods. In the first, which lasted longer in some colonies than in others, the selectors were concerned with winning their land and finding a local market; in the second, they came to grips with the problems of farming on lands of light rainfall and of selling their produce on an unstable international market. Although the two experiences of settlement and expansion flowed into each other, their impacts were separate. Both encouraged the agricultural communities to think of themselves as being apart from the rest of Australian society and to regard politics as a system of group warfare.

The doubling of Australia's population during the gold rush gave the agricultural industries their first opportunity to expand beyond the coastal regions and the river valleys. Between 1850 and 1860 the area under grain in Australia rose from 210,000 to 644,000 acres, the greatest increase occurring in South Australia which was at one point virtually the granary for the eastern colonies. By the sixties, the South Australian wheat industry was rapidly maturing and had built up a regular export trade with England, so that when poor selectors were enabled by the Land Acts of 1872 and 1888 to take up holdings on liberal terms, they had access to an industry which had already established its financial and trading connections and had developed good techniques of cultivation and harvesting. While the governments of New South Wales had favoured the pastoralists, successive governments of South Australia did everything they could in the latter half of the century to promote wheat growing. The South Australian Agricultural Bureau, for example, assisted farmers far more than did the Departments of Agriculture in New South Wales and Victoria.

In the last two colonies, the gold rushes created a heavy demand for land, which was in effect a demand for the termination of some pastoral leases and their subdivision for closer settlement. In neither colony was the early land legislation as effective as the would-be selectors desired, but the Victorian Act of 1860, providing for selection after survey, was more satisfactory than were the 1861 Acts of New South Wales, which

permitted selection before survey and in this and other ways enabled squatters and land speculators to sabotage the law's application. Settlement proceeded steadily nonetheless: the zones of agricultural incursion began to shift slowly inland, following the railways on to the Tablelands and from there to the slopes and river valleys on the western side of the Great Dividing Range. As this new frontier edged forward into the pastoral hinterland, its farmers began to demand two things from the government—land reform, and tariff protection against imported grains. In New South Wales, the land reformers hoped to build up a legal system which would force the squatters to relinquish their remaining hold on agricultural land, and the 1875 and 1884 Land Acts were steps in this direction; in Victoria, the object was to make it easier for selectors to purchase and improve their land without falling prey to money lenders, an object which was served by the 1869 and 1878 Land Acts. In tariff matters, the Victorian farmers were the more fortunate; their colony imposed a duty on imported wheat in 1868 and raised it on several later occasions whereas New South Wales did not impose a similar tariff until 1891.[1] However, these differences were ones of degree, for the farmers of Victoria and New South Wales shared a common frontier experience in their battles against the squatters, the money lenders, and the importing merchants. Their political action was sectional action. They formed selectors' associations, organized conventions in the capital cities, and voted for selectors' men in elections.

Land Acts and tariff protection offered the eastern wheat industries a chance to establish themselves. Their chance to grow came with the minor revolution in agricultural science which took place at the end of the century. Technical advances such as the invention in 1884 of H. V. McKay's combine-harvester, the development of the stump-jump plough and various scrub rollers, the use of phosphatic manures and the practice of fallowing, and William Farrer's successful evolution of rust- and disease-resistant grains,[2] combined with a further period of railway building and a run of good prices, made possible an increase in production which lifted first Victoria and later New South Wales into the wheat export trade. In the first decade of the new century Western Australia also began exporting wheat. The production increases of the period 1881-1915 are compared in the accompanying table with the proportions of the crop exported from each colony.[3]

[1] Edgars Dunsdorfs, *The Australian Wheat-Growing Industry, 1788-1948*, pp. 165-6.

[2] Brian Fitzpatrick, *The British Empire in Australia, An Economic History 1834-1939*, 2nd ed., pp. 144-54; Dunsdorfs, op. cit., pp. 149-61.

[3] Production figures from *Primary Industries, 1956-57. Part I, Rural Industries.* Bulletin No. 51, p. 29.

Export figures from: *Statistical Register of South Australia, 1936-37*, Summary, p. 15; *New South Wales Statistical Register, 1915-16*, p. 692; *1919-20*, p. 900 (interstate figures excluded); *Victorian Year-Book, 1918-19*, p. 586; *Official Year Book of Western Australia, 1957*, p. 328.

Annual average wheat production ('000,000 bushels)

	1881–85	*1886–90*	*1891–95*	*1896–1900*	*1901–05*	*1906–10*	*1911–15*
South Australia	10·66	11·15	9·29	5·99	10·17	20·25	17·33
Victoria	10·64	10·95	13·59	11·63	16·43	22·05	23·76
New South Wales	3·96	4·26	5·59	9·49	15·27	19·14	27·25
Western Australia	·31	·34	·37	·53	1·32	3·21	7·08

Average proportions of wheat crop exported in quinquennia (percentages)

	1881–85	*1886–90*	*1891–95*	*1896–1900*	*1901–05*	*1906–10*	*1911–15*
South Australia	44	35	48	24	54	73	67
Victoria	27	9	25	26	53	51	50
New South Wales				3	27	25	38
Western Australia					9	21	40

Note: The wheat production figures relate to seasons (twelve months ending 30 June). In tables of wheat exports calendar years were used until 31 December 1913; the figures for 1914 are for a six months' period ending 30 June; and those for 1915 for the twelve months ending 30 June.

The sheer pace of this expansion and the dependence on export earnings which it created altered significantly the character of agrarian politics, for as Australian prices moved into close accord with those ruling in the international market, the Australian farmer found himself confronted with a source of economic instability over which the State had little control. The problem of a variable income was a major one in an industry with such a high cost-structure like the wheat industry, and it was aggravated by the fact that the wheat belt had already reached its geographical limits between the 15″ and 10″ isohyets in such areas as the Mallee and the Riverina. The fall in production associated with the serious droughts of 1902 and 1914 is an illustration of the variations in yield which farming in an unpredictable climate involves. Price and production variations are shown in the table.[4]

Nine of the twenty-five seasons between 1890-1 and 1914-15 showed declines in production of more than 20 per cent over the previous season's harvest. In some cases a decline may be partially explained by farmers having switched to other grain crops or having increased their holdings of sheep and cattle after a fall in prices, but the main cause of disparity in the size of crops was undoubtedly the fluctuations in yield induced by rainfall variations and other climatic factors.

The rapid growth of the wheat industry magnified and aggravated its structural weaknesses. On the financial side, supplies of credit from private sources were over-generous in good years and too restricted in bad ones, and growers, hoping to gamble on a bumper crop or a high price, borrowed unwisely. (Dunsdorfs has calculated that by 1914-15 the farmers were indebted to the extent of £18 million.)[5] However, although demands for a State Bank and for an extension of existing public credit agencies were increasing in this period, the farmers' usual remedy for high costs was to press for a reduction of tariffs on the imported items on which they most depended—agricultural machinery, fencing wire and phosphatic manures. Thus, from being protectionists, they gradually evolved into revenue tariffists, complaining that as their export trade expanded and they became the victims of an unpredictable international commodity market, their local costs were being boosted by the raising of tariff barriers. While the wheat prices continued to rise this demand was muted, especially in New South Wales and Victoria where protectionist sentiment still lingered, but when prices fell in 1910 and 1911 the embattled free traders found farmers coming to their aid. The Lyne Tariff of 1908 was a particular object of hostility,

[4] Production figures from *Primary Industries, 1956-57. Part I, Rural Industries.* Bulletin No. 51, p. 29. Yield averages from Dunsdorfs, op. cit., pp. 534-5.
Price series from: *New South Wales Year Book, 1904-05*, p. 300; *1931-32*, p. 548; *Victorian Year-Book, 1895-98*, p. 865; *1906-07*, p. 546; *1919-20*, p. 495; *Statistical Register of South Australia, Production, 1893*, p. 11; *1902*, p. 70; *1907*, p. 139; *1911*, p. 150; *1915-16*, p. 165.

[5] Dunsdorfs, op. cit., p. 425.

	Australian wheat production ('000,000 bushels)		*Av. wheat yield bushels per acre*		*Prices per bushel (s. d.)*		
Season	*Production*	*Seasonal increase/decrease*	*Year*	*Yield*	*Sydney*	*Melbourne*	*Adelaide*
1890–91	27·1	− 6·9	1891	7·7	3/8·75	3/5	4/5
1891–92	25·7	− 1·4	1892	9·5	4/9	4/1	4/1·75
1892–93	32·8	+ 7·1	1893	9·5	3/6·25	2/11·25	3/–
1893–94	37·1	+ 4·3	1894	7·5	2/9·50	1/11·25	2/3
1894–95	27·9	− 9·2	1895	5·2	2/7	1/7·50	2/9·75
1895–96	18·3	− 9·6	1896	4·9	4/4·75	4/5·25	4/6·75
1896–97	20·9	+ 2·6	1897	6·5	4/7·25	5/3·25	5/2·50
1897–98	28·2	+ 7·3	1898	7·6	3/8	4/1	3/10
1898–99	41·4	+13·2	1899	7·1	2/9	2/2	2/9·25
1899–1900	40·0	− 1·4	1900	8·5	2/8·50	2/5	2/9
1900–01	48·4	+ 8·4	1901	7·5	2/8	2/5·75	2/9·50
1901–02	38·6	− 9·8	1902	2·4	4/5	2/10·25	4/1
1902–03	12·4	−26·2	1903	13·3	5/1·75*	6/–	5/0·50
1903–04	74·1	+61·7	1904	8·7	3/2	2/8	3/2
1904–05	54·5	−19·6	1905	11·2	3/5	2/11·50	3/5
1905–06	68·5	+14·0	1906	11·1	3/3·50	2/10·50	3/2
1906–07	66·4	− 2·1	1907	8·3	3/10	2/9	3/8
1907–08	44·7	−21·7	1908	11·9	4/3·50	4/0·50	3/10·50
1908–09	62·6	+17·9	1909	13·7	4/9	3/9·25	4/5
1909–10	90·4	+27·8	1910	12·9	3/10	3/9·75	3/8·50
1910–11	95·1	+ 4·7	1911	9·6	3/6	3/2	3/4·50
1911–12	71·6	−23·5	1912	12·5	4/1	3/4·75	3/10
1912–13	92·0	+20·4	1913	11·1	3/7·25	3/3·75	3/6·50
1913–14	103·3	+11·3	1914	2·6	4/1·50	3/3	4/1·50
1914–15	24·9	−78·4					

* Imported wheat.

Notes: 1. The Melbourne prices are the average for February and March, minus freight and handling charges.
2. The Sydney prices are the average annual ruling rates on the city market, except for the figures up to 1897 which are February-March averages only.
3. The Adelaide prices are average season rates to 1901, and annual average rates from 1902.

In their efforts to lower costs, wheat farmers also turned their attention to the marketing system, which had done its best to deal with the increased volume of business (210 million bushels were exported between 1909 and 1913 compared with only 33·3 million between 1889 and 1893). Established Australian firms such as John Darling and Co. had been forced to make room in the trade for branches of large overseas firms such as Louis Dreyfus and Co., and although nothing comparable to the grain exchanges of Chicago and Winnipeg developed in Australia, a system adapted to local needs was built up. Each year, a standard weight per bushel (known as the 'fair average quality'—f.a.q.) was fixed by the Corn Trade Sectional Committees of the various Chambers of Commerce.[6] Only in Sydney were government and growers' representatives present when the f.a.q. standard was fixed, and there were frequent complaints that it was often set below the actual average weight per bushel of the bulk of the harvest, to the advantage of the trader. Growers also suspected that the traders sometimes combined to fix buying prices: a South Australian Royal Commission reported in 1908 that nine Adelaide traders and millers had an 'honourable understanding' to regulate prices and a Victorian Commission of 1913-14 concluded that a similar understanding had been reached by Melbourne traders.[7] It was the traders who were in a position to dictate terms. Most wheat was purchased at country sidings by buyers' and millers' representatives who made very little allowance for differences in the quality of the grain offered and would deduct freight and storage costs from the price given. As few wheat farmers had surplus money, they were forced to sell their crop to traders as soon as the Australian buying season began in December or January when prices on the London market were low, knowing that the traders would then withhold it for three or four months until prices had risen through increased demand.[8]

However, in spite of the strength of their grievances, wheat farmers seemed singularly unable to effect an improvement in wheat-marketing methods. As the Victorian Royal Commission of 1913-14 noted:

> Running through the evidence there is to be perceived an undercurrent of despair, often indignantly expressed, at the exactions which the present system of handling and marketing makes on every bushel of Australian wheat.

[6] A. R. Callaghan and A. J. Millington, *The Wheat Industry in Australia*, ch. 22.

[7] 'Progress Report of the Royal Commission on the Question of the Marketing of Wheat', Pap. 20, pp. vii-viii, x-xi, and Appendices K and L, pp. 434-5, *S.A. P.P.*, 1908, vol. II; 'Progress Report from the Royal Commission on the Marketing, Transportation, and Storage of Grain', Pap. 21, p. 59, *V.P.P.*, 1913-14, vol. II.

[8] On the pattern of the old Australian wheat season, see G. L. Wood, 'Wheat Pools, with Special Reference to Australia', *Economic Record*, Supplement, February 1928, pp. 22-3.

> . . . the farmers now fully realize their helplessness under the existing methods of marketing, handling, storing, and transportation of their product. In all the wheat-producing States of Australia there is abundant evidence that they are striving to free themselves from the shackles of the market manipulators and an obsolete system which makes their produce pay unfair tolls. They are insistently appealing for a radical reform which will enable them to get a fair return and have control of their produce until it is actually sold.[9]

Experiments in co-operative marketing either lost their reforming spirit, or languished for lack of support. The South Australian Farmers' Co-operative Union, formed in November 1888, had carved out a secure position for itself in the Adelaide trade; its nominal capital grew from £20,000 to £250,000 in its first ten years and by 1909 its shares numbered 40,000 and shareholders 7,500, but by this stage it was openly following the practices prevailing in the grain business. Questioned by the South Australian Commissioners, its Director said that the Union observed the prices set by the proprietary firms because it did not wish to have a larger part of the trade than it could handle.[10] A similar docility was shown by the equally secure Victorian Producers' Co-operative Company Limited. On the other hand, more radical organizations, such as the Farmers' Co-operative Trading Company associated with the New South Wales Farmers and Settlers' Association,[11] frequently faded away. On 30 August 1898, for example, a conference of Victorian growers agreed to establish an Australian Farmers' Co-operative Company which was to export wheat, build mills, stores and granaries, import bags and fertilizer, charter ships, and generally attend to 'the proper management of the farmers' exporting and agency business'. Within a year, however, the provisional directors were winding up the company's business and repaying shares; nothing like the expected support had been forthcoming.[12]

Another possibility, that of adapting North American bulk-handling techniques to Australian conditions, had been discussed since the 1890s and South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales had all held inquiries into its feasibility.[13] Although the practical interest in the method lay in the reduction of handling charges in the transfer of grain from rail to ship, the answers given to the 1913-14 Victorian

[9] 'Progress Report from the Royal Commission on Marketing', Pap. 21, p. 57, *V.P.P.*, 1913-14, vol. II.

[10] Ibid., p. 45; 'Final Report of the Royal Commission on the Question of the Marketing of Wheat', Pap. 23, pp. 102-3, *S.A. P.P.*, 1909.

[11] See the evidence of T. I. Campbell, 'Progress Report of the Royal Commission on the Question of the Marketing of Wheat', Pap. 20, p. 273, Q. 7166, *S.A. P.P.*, 1908, vol. II.

[12] *Age* (Melbourne), 31 Aug. 1898, 8 Sept. 1899.

[13] Callaghan and Millington, *Wheat Industry in Australia*, ch. 23; F. S. Alford, 'Bulk Handling of Wheat in Australia', *Economic Record*, VIII, 1, May 1932, pp. 41-54.

Commission made it clear that many farmers also saw in the system an opportunity to reduce the role of the hated 'middleman' in the marketing process by having the State transport the wheat as far as possible on the growers' behalf—perhaps to the ships, perhaps as far as the London buyers or even the British consumer.[14] Faced with the objections to bulk handling raised by the shippers and merchants, however, the farmers were not enthusiastic in pressing for the reform. In South Australia, indeed, the established wheat farmers were opposed to it.

In fact, up to the time of World War I, Australian wheat farmers had developed nothing like the degree of class consciousness or the organization of the Canadian growers. There were no bodies in Australia of the calibre of the prairie Grain Growers' Associations nor were there Australian agrarian leaders of the stature of E. A. Partridge. But the inadequacy of the Australian farmers' response in these years should not lead one to suppose that their grievances were not keenly felt. They were. The difference between the Australians and their North American counterparts was basically that in Australia there were not the tangible symbols of exploitation—such as the Winnipeg and Chicago Grain Exchanges, or the combination of proprietary railway and elevator companies—on which wheat farmers' protests could be focused. Nevertheless, their sectional outlook showed itself in their demands for tariff reductions, for bulk handling, for co-operative marketing, demands which were backed by an awareness that farmers' problems were sectional, and which were to lead them on to the idea that, if necessary, their political action should also be sectional.

Agrarian Ideology and Doctrine

As Russel Ward has pointed out, 'the typical Australian frontiersman was not a small, individualist farmer' but the itinerant pastoral worker of the outback.[15] It was he, Ward suggests, who gave Australians their national legend and their characteristic values—those of mateship, adaptability, self-sufficiency, and a collectivist ethic—and whose way of life was idealized in the late nineteenth century by writers such as 'Banjo' Paterson and Henry Lawson.[16] There were, however, other important traditions besides that of the bushworker; one such was that of the coalminers of eastern Australia,[17] another that of the small selectors and farmers of the new wheatlands.

Agrarian separatism was partly a function of an agrarian ideology.

[14] See 'Progress Report from the Royal Commission on Marketing', Pap. 21, Minutes of Evidence, p. 126, Q. 3002; p. 160, Q. 4025; p. 170, Q. 4306; p. 191, Q. 4914; pp. 192-3, Q. 4950; p. 223, Qs. 5731-2, *V.P.P.*, 1913-14, vol. II.

[15] Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 226.

[16] Ibid., pp. 221-40.

[17] Robin Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales, A History of the Union 1860-1960.*

Australian farmers developed their own 'legend' in which heroes such as the noble selector and the sturdy pioneer not unexpectedly bulked larger than did the pastoral worker. Hofstadter has discussed the way in which an eighteenth-century literary interest in the pastoral myths of the classical world was transmuted by Jefferson and his followers into the American countryman's agrarian myth.[18] A variation of the latter grew up amongst Australian farmers; they adapted its themes and its heroes, they changed its historical setting, but they retained its essential values. In Australia, as in America, countrymen tended to regard farming as the most ennobling of vocations and rural communities the most natural form of association. It was through life in the country that a man developed most fully as a human being, both in labour and in daily contact with nature. The yeoman hero of the North American myth does appear occasionally in Australian agrarian tradition (an organization called the Associated Australian Yeomanry has been recorded in Victoria),[19] but more often his place is taken by the noble pioneer, the exemplar of the individualism, the rugged independence and the moral integrity brought out by life on the land.

Like his American counterpart, the Australian farmer saw his industry as the basis of the nation's economy, a fact to which many of his favourite images bear witness: in them the nation is compared to the body and the farmers to the backbone or the heart; the economy is described as a wheel with agriculture as its hub, or as a tree whose roots are the primary industries. 'The farmer was the root of the tree. If the roots were not sound the leaves would wither, and few flowers would be produced.'[20] Much more than an economic doctrine is being expressed here; with economic primacy goes social primacy, with industrial vitality goes moral vitality. As the roots, or the heart, or the hub of the wheel, the farming community brings life to the rest of society. It is the farmer who 'gives his girls and boys to the big cities to infuse . . . red blood into a society that is constantly decadent, and whose only salvation is the virility it draws from the rural section'.[21]

It was Hofstadter once again who noted with reference to American farmers that belief in an agrarian myth became stronger as farmers became more and more businesslike, speculating in land and produce.[22]

[18] Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, pp. 23-30. See also Paul H. Johnstone, 'Old Ideals Versus New Ideas in Farm Life', *The Yearbook of Agriculture 1940*, pp. 111-70.

[19] *Age*, 5 Apr. 1888.

[20] From a statement by an independent candidate in the 1920 Victorian election (*Argus*, Melbourne, 13 Oct. 1920). In F. R. Mercer, *On Farmers' Service, A Short History of Farmers' Organisation in Western Australia*, there is a full-page picture of a tree (p.v.) illustrating the dependence of the secondary on the primary industries. Its caption reads: 'THE TREE OF LIFE, NEGLECT THE ROOTS AND THE TREE WILL DIE'.

[21] *Southern Argus* (Wagin), 31 Jan. 1920.

[22] Hofstadter, op. cit., pp. 36-46.

The reality of agricultural capitalism and economic insecurity was far removed from the myth of the self-sufficient yeoman and the stable rural community. In the late nineteenth century agricultural communities were dispersed and fragmentary, their culture lacked coherence, farming for most of the time was barely profitable. But the farmers' insecurity intensified their commitment to values which implied a claim to past or future security and promised them reintegration within the larger society along with the moral recognition their vocation deserved. The tension between myth and reality created a number of related phobias. One was anti-urbanism; the city became the antithesis of the rural utopia. Every good thing in country life was balanced by its opposite in city life, whose bright lights, entertainments, painted women and crowded streets became symbols of an inferior culture. With anti-urbanism went a strand of xenophobia, even of racialism, as this extract from a country journal in 1921 shows:

> Most of us have seen colored populations in other parts, Egypt, Africa, or America, and even on the surface the idea of having a colored race in our own country has not appealed; but those who have looked deeper have become even more emphatic in their vow to keep Australia white. The racial riots of America, and the condition of residents of South Africa where the manhood of the country cannot, in many parts safely leave the women-folk alone in the home at night, are facts that have filled us with a determination to see that the problem does not become ours. But what is the use of vows with teeming millions of colored people within a week of our thousands of miles of undefended coastline, and our meagre population of 5½ millions down in one little corner of a continent of just on three million square miles in area?[23]

Whereas in America the frontier settler and the sturdy yeoman tended to be the heroes of countryman and urban dweller alike, in Australia the farmer's distorted view of the city was matched by the city man's equally biased attitude towards 'dungarees'[24] or 'cockatoos'. By about 1890, according to Ward, the 'cocky' had become a 'byword for meanness and stupidity' even amongst the pastoral workers, who made fun of his poverty, his capacity for year-round work, his poor housing and his lack of style. Ward cites one of Paterson's ballads in which a miner sings of the wretched food and general hardships he had to endure while reaping wheat for a 'stringy-bark cockatoo'.[25] Frequently in bushworkers' songs about cockies there is found an undercurrent of hostility, as if farmers were denaturing the original values of the pastoral frontier. Life in the new farming communities was foreign to the bushworkers in many ways: it may be that they saw in the cocky's homestead the symbol of a settled existence and all that it meant in terms of conventional morality. 'Mrs Cocky' appears to

[23] *New State Magazine* (Tamworth), 16 Aug. 1921, p. 11.

[24] Dunsdorfs, *Wheat-Growing Industry*, p. 90.

[25] Ward, op. cit., pp. 184-6.

have been an object of interest to members of what had been a predominantly masculine society. In one version of 'The Stringy-Bark Cockatoo' there are intriguing hints of sexual jealousy between the bushworker and the farmer, as the unfortunate worker, this time a shearer, nurses the farmer's child after supper:

Whenever I cracked a bit of a joke the Missus she would smile;
The old feller got jealous; looked like he'd murder me;
And there he sat and whipped the cat, the Cocky in Bungaree.[26]

In urban lore also the cocky was frequently a figure of a comic world. Dad and Dave, Mum and Mabel, first introduced by Steele Rudd (A. H. Davis) in *On Our Selection* (1899), have been portrayed in radio serials and films and have become the stereotypes of the outback family: Dad pigheaded and ponderous, Mum an endless mine of clichés, Dave semi-moronic, and his wife Mabel a dull-witted young woman. The farmers laughed with the rest at this grotesque caricature, but resentment smouldered beneath the surface. Denied honour in the broader society, agricultural communities tended to become inward-looking and withdrawn, feeling ignored in a land which depended on their industry for a large part of its wealth.

The farmer has left few folk songs to record his state of mind, but those which we have are most interesting for the bitterness which shows in them from time to time. Here is one from the early days of New South Wales settlement which voices the general antagonism felt by selectors towards the landlord and the lawyer.

It's twenty years, or nearly so, since first I started farming,
And many curious things I've seen, and changes quite alarming—
For then, as gay as any lark I worked from early dawning,
Till night came on and with the sun I rose again next morning.

So if the truth you'd understand,
And wisdom you'd discover,
Just listen to the oldest hand
Upon the Hunter's River.

But land was very hard to get, and interest very high, Sir;
They sold my farm the other day to pay the mortgagee, Sir.
So after twenty years have passed, with all my constant toiling,
I'm left without a stick at last to keep the pot a-boiling.

The landlord was too much for me,
The lawyers were too clever;
They've rooted out the oldest hand
Upon the Hunter's River.[27]

[26] 'The Cocky in Bungaree', version sung by A. L. Lloyd, *The Banks of the Condamine and other Bush Songs*, Wattle Record, C.4.

[27] 'Upon the Hunter's River', Charles MacAlister, *Old Pioneering Days in the Sunny South* (Goulburn, 1907), p. 152, cited by C. J. King, 'An Outline of Closer Settlement in New South Wales, Part I', *Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics*, xxv, 3-4, Sept.-Dec. 1957, p. 108.

The bitterness felt by farmers at their lack of status and at their 'exploitation' often showed itself in the verse published in country newspapers early in this century. One Victorian versifier made a heavy comparison between the Australian settler and Longfellow's 'Village Blacksmith'.

> Under the spreading bankruptcy,
> The farmer's homestead stands,
> Its lord a mournful man is he
> As he ploughs his mortgaged lands,
> For the laws that seize his cream and cheese
> As strong as iron bands.
>
> His face is thin, and long and grim,
> And burnt like Pharaoh's bricks;
> His brow is wet with honest sweat,
> His shins are blue with kicks;
> His toes are bent and crumpled up
> From kicking at the pricks.[28]

Perhaps it was partly because the farmer had to fight so hard to gain acceptance in Australian society that he attached such importance to building up some form of community life of his own. There is a trace of irony in this old settler's recollection of the efforts that were made to gain some relief from the long hours and the isolation of the agrarian frontier:

> In those first years there was practically no recreation. Men found their way through the bush on Saturday nights to each others' homes, and played euchre or draughts, and so strong was the social instinct that women sat in drays on Sundays and travelled miles to see each other. None, however, could spare daylight, and the lucky chap who was sent away to a far distant blacksmith with a broken plough was regarded with feelings amounting to malice and uncharitableness. Most people arose at 5 o'clock in the winter and a little earlier in summer. Working horses were turned out at night, and brought in and fed before daylight. . . . Some two years after we selected, mysterious agencies began to arrange dances here and there, and thus another autocrat claimed large portions of our scant sleeping hours. It was often necessary to retire to bed early, arise, catch horses, and ride hard for miles in order to worship at the shrine. Parents never could realise in those days that there were pleasures even more attractive than clearing, fencing, and ploughing. It was therefore necessary, in order to avoid doing violence to the feelings of authorities, to resort to peaceful yet effective means of escape. Often after the concertina had wailed out the last figure of the last set there was a wild gallop for home, hasty mustering and feeding of draught horses, and changing of 'Sunday' clothes and elastic-sided boots for moleskins and hobnails before the household awoke.[29]

[28] 'The Farmer's Lament', *Farmers' Advocate*, 23 Nov. 1922.

[29] King, op. cit., Appendix VII, pp. 274-5, being an undated extract from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *c.* 1904-7.

The themes of conflict and social tension which run strongly through the political myths of Australian rural communities are linked with the sense of alienation, of lack of status and security which troubled the pioneering generations of the agricultural frontier. From one position, farmers saw politics as a struggle between city and country, with the former trying to establish a trading dominance over the latter; from another, they saw them as a struggle for economic advantage and privilege between competing groups or classes. They mapped out a battlefield in which groups were armies and the state a kind of truce agency with a commission to keep the peace and to mediate between rival interests. The theme of group conflict goes right back to the beginnings of agricultural settlement. As early as 1841, petitioners from a New South Wales district pressed for restrictions to prevent the importation of cheap grain and flour from abroad.

> The only persons likely to derive benefit from the ruin of the Colonial farmers, would be a few overgrown Capitalists in our own and Foreign ports, who would contrive, whenever an attempt was made to grow Colonial Grain, to keep the price a little below that which would remunerate the Colonial Agriculturalists, and having succeeded in driving them from the market, those large Capitalists would then be in a condition to exact whatever price they thought proper.[30]

The idea that colonial society was a system of competing interests was encouraged in nineteenth-century Victoria by the piecemeal imposition of protective tariffs in response to group pressures. In the late eighties, the farmers frequently complained that the only sections to benefit from protection were the manufacturers and workers: one man declared at a Horsham meeting that

> If a deputation from the manufacturing industries waited upon Ministers they got what they wanted at once, and additional taxation was put on in their favour. The wheat-growing farmer, however, never got even justice, and it was our duty to ourselves and our children to see that we got our rights. The farmers were the yeomanry of the country, and, in the best sense, produced revenue, and yet the farmer and grazier were entirely ignored by the Treasurer.[31]

Political analysis in sectional terms was common during World War I, when the country parties were being formed. A Victorian activist put the problem in these terms:

> Every class but the farmer has been organised for years, and he is paying the piper for not being so. The manufacturers get duties increased, laborers get wages increased and hours shortened, and business men pass the increased price on. The farmer can't pass it on, and to make matters worse, when a natural shortage comes and

[30] *Votes and Proceedings, New South Wales Legislative Council, 1841,* Paper No. 11, 28 July 1841, cited in Dunsdorfs, op. cit., p. 58.

[31] *Horsham Times,* 6 Aug. 1889.

> prices go up, city interests fix the price to suit themselves, and the farmers just have to take it; and so this will continue until we do as the laboring men did. The city wants a city man to represent it —he understands its wants and needs. The country likewise should have a country man to represent it, and who understands the wants of the country better than the farmer. Therefore, it behoves every farmer to cast a class-conscious vote for the farmers' representative.[32]

Overlaying the conflict of sections, the farmer envisaged political competition between regions, especially between the large cities and their rural hinterland. The concentration of the Australian population in a few large cities had caused concern to countrymen well before the turn of the century. Between 1851 and 1901, Sydney's population grew from 54,000 to 480,000 and Melbourne's from 23,000 to 494,000; by 1901 Sydney contained 35·90 per cent of the population of New South Wales and Melbourne 41·13 per cent of that of Victoria.[33] Many farmers took the view that this centralization was the result of a deliberate policy on the part of city politicians to build up wealth and power at the expense of country districts. They alleged that trade and city interests, through their control of the government and parliament, had ensured that the roads and railways of each colony converged on the capital cities, thereby starving the small ports; and that having once established this monopoly over trade with the dependent regions, these interests had conspired to keep freights and service charges high, to milk the countryside, and to batter down rival trading centres. According to a 1920 pamphlet arguing for a new state in northern New South Wales,

> where political power is combined with commercial supremacy the danger will always be that the political power may be used to advance the commercial interests of the centre at the expense of the remainder. And that precisely is what has happened in Sydney. . . . Every line of railway has been designed, not with a view to develop the country, but to insure that all trade shall go to Sydney. . . . Not only were the railways so designed, but in their administration they were deliberately used to crush out all competitors, and by a system of differential rates trade was diverted from its natural channels. Notably is this the case in New England, where rates were deliberately fixed to kill the trade to the North Coast ports, to which naturally it belonged.[34]

Agitations for new colonies were a commonplace of nineteenth-century politics in eastern Australia and as often as not hostility to-

[32] 'Tongala Branch Victorian Farmers' Union', circular issued by Mr Harold Hanslow in October 1917.

[33] T. A. Coghlan, *A Statistical Account of Australia and New Zealand, 1902-3* (Sydney, 1904), p. 172.

[34] 'Australian Subdivision, Effect on Development, The Case for Northern New South Wales', Glen Innes, 1920, p. 8.

wards a capital city was the moving force. The northern districts of New South Wales, made up of the early settlements on the Richmond and Clarence Rivers and the adjacent Tablelands, tried during the 1850s to break their connection with Sydney by having the southern boundary of the new colony of Queensland drawn at the 30th or the 32nd parallel, and they were disappointed when the 29th parallel was chosen instead. Thereafter these districts made periodic demands either for attachment to Queensland or for the formation of a new colony based on the northern rivers. In each case the grievances were the same: it was claimed that more public revenue was being drawn from the region than was being spent on it and that Sydney commercial interests were preventing the north from developing its own ports or establishing a railway link with Brisbane.[35] There were similar separatist movements in northern Queensland, the Riverina[36] and western Victoria.[37]

The anti-urbanism generated by such movements was often associated with anti-parliamentary attitudes, as reflected in various conspiratorial theories of colonial government, jibes about legislatures being talking shops, and complaints about the money spent on publishing Hansard and on polishing the door knobs of debating chambers. Hostility towards parliamentary institutions was probably a factor in the Kyabram movement which shook Victoria immediately after federation. At this time the Victorian Legislative Assembly contained ninety-five members, and the Legislative Council forty-eight, the number of salaried ministers in the State cabinet being fixed at ten. Having agreed that these numbers should be reduced, Sir George Turner's Liberal government decided that the people should be asked to elect a Constitutional Convention, which should also investigate the possibility of other reforms, such as the cutting down of the power of the Legislative Council. Alarmed, the Conservatives opposed the Bill when it was introduced in July 1901 by A. J. Peacock, Turner's successor,[38] with the result that, on 12 November, Peacock announced that the Convention Bill would be dropped and the membership of the houses of parliament reduced somewhat by legislation.[39] This temporizing was the signal for a popular 'reform' agitation which began in the northern town of Kyabram and spread rapidly to other parts of the State; by May 1902 meetings demanding drastic reductions in the size of the

[35] U. R. Ellis, *New Australian States*, pp. 47-70, 82-7; 'A New State, Proposed Separation of Northern New South Wales', Supplement to the *Walcha Witness*, 8 May 1915, held at the office of the New England New State Movement, Armidale.

[36] Ellis, op. cit., pp. 88-113 and 71-81.

[37] William Westgarth, *The Colony of Victoria* (Melbourne, 1864), pp. 112 ff; *Farmers' Advocate*, 10 Mar. 1921.

[38] *V.P.D.*, vol. 97, 30 July 1901, p. 496.

[39] Ibid., vol. 98, 12 Nov. 1901, pp. 2574-7.

State and Federal Parliaments and of the State cabinet had been held in 172 places and a Citizens' Reform League of 90 branches had been established.[40] The Peacock government was defeated in June and William Irvine, who then took office, later obtained a dissolution and won the subsequent election on the need for retrenchment and 'constitutional reform'. His government went on to pass the Constitution Act 1903 (No. 1864) which cut down the membership of the Assembly to sixty-eight and that of the Legislative Council to thirty-four while reducing the number of responsible ministers from ten to eight. Although the Kyabram movement has been portrayed as an agency of reform, directed to overhaul the Victorian Constitution following the formation of the Commonwealth,[41] it also contained overtones of anti-urban, anti-Labor and anti-liberal sentiment. Much of its enthusiasm arose from the discontent produced by the severe drought of 1902 and, at the local level, its most obvious aspect was a demand for the reduction of the number of civil servants, ministers and parliamentarians on the ground that they were parasites feeding on the real toilers of the country.

The Farmers' Search for Political Forms

As his economic concerns increased so the small farmer broadened his search for political forms. His energies were directed to several objectives: at the local level he tried to build up clubs or associations, and gradually to increase their functions; outside the district he gave his support to sectional, regional or co-operative institutions. In the last decades of the nineteenth century the process of association-building in country communities was continuous: some organizations would last a few years and then fade away; others would carry on at a low level of activity; others would adapt themselves to changing conditions and survive. Local co-operative institutions were numerous, especially in Victoria and Western Australia, and in these too a constant process of evolution was selecting the fittest and eliminating the weakest. At the same time farmers were testing out ways of making Parliament more responsive to their demands. The local member was required to act in the colonial assembly not only as the representative of his district but as the representative of his class, and his association with country factions inside the major parties was always welcomed. It was this constant experiment with political techniques, an experiment guided to some extent by North American experience, which ultimately translated the agrarian separatism of the eighties and nineties into the country party movement of the new century. One cannot point with certainty to any particular rural organization or country faction as the

[40] *Age*, 27 May 1902; *Argus*, 22, 24 May 1919.

[41] E.g. H. L. Neilson, *The Voice of the People*; U. R. Ellis, *The Country Party. A Political and Social History of the Party in New South Wales*, pp. 20-2.

progenitor of the present-day Country Party—the streams of influence are far too mixed for that. All that one can do is show that the broad factors just discussed—the special economic condition of the wheat industry and the agrarian tradition—were finding expression at all levels in the political system before the country party movement acquired definite direction in the years immediately preceding 1914.

As an interesting example of the form these country organizations took, we are fortunate enough to have a complete record of those functioning in Western Australia at the turn of the century in the *Statistical Register* of that State. In 1904, for example, the *Register* listed 86 associations with a membership of 3,292. These included the six or seven prestige organizations, such as the Royal Agricultural Society of Western Australia, formed in 1831, and a large number of purely professional clubs and committees concerned with nothing more than organizing the annual agricultural show, but there were several semi-political associations which were to play an important part in the founding of the Farmers and Settlers' Association in 1912. Almost all the local associations had been formed after 1890, and their number was increasing steadily between 1896 and 1904; each year several groups would disappear from the list but new ones would be added. The *Register* gives membership figures for this period, and these too show a regular ebb and flow.[42] The Victorian Royal Commission which inquired into grain marketing in 1913-14 also discovered a large number of farmers' associations thriving at the local level, where they were mainly interested in forming co-operative agencies for the purchase of corn-sacks, fertilizers and farm implements and constructing grain sheds and railway sidings. Their membership probably represented only a small proportion of the total number of farmers (the Horsham Farmers' Association, for example, had 138 members out of a possible 1,000)[43] but that proportion clearly included most of the leaders of local opinion.

Although the evidence on this point is incomplete it does appear that the important period of association-building at the local level occurred in the agricultural communities between about 1875 and 1900. Organizational experience gained at this stage was most important, and aided directly the formation of the country parties, for it was through their local associations that farmers became aware of the wider ramifications of their industry, especially during the rapid expansion of the wheat export trade. Agrarian doctrine in Australia was very much a local product, based on an accumulation of individual encounters with the grain trade, tariff regulations, transport problems, and banking operations.

[42] *Western Australia, Statistical Register*, Part V, *Land Settlement, Agriculture and Livestock, 1896*, p. 56; *1897*, pp. 62-3; *1898*, pp. 50-1; *1899*, pp. 50-1; *1900*, pp. 54-5; *1901*, pp. 58-9; *1902*, pp. 56-9; *1903*, pp. 58-61; *1904*, pp. 58-61.

[43] 'Progress Report from the Royal Commission on Marketing', Pap. 21, Minutes of Evidence, p. 132, Q. 3117, *V.P.P.*, 1913-14, vol. II.

Most of the sectional and regional organizations of this period established themselves by linking together existing local associations rather than by forming new branches. Perhaps the clearest example is provided by the Victorian Farmers' Protection Association (V.F.P.A.), whose formation in 1887 will be discussed in a later section (pp. 68-70). All that needs to be noted here is that of the fifty-six associations listed as attending its second convention, held in Melbourne in April 1888, only twenty-seven were actually branches of the organization. The rest were agricultural societies, shire councils and other groups; and of the twenty-seven V.F.P.A. branches, most had existed before the central organization had been formed.[44] The V.F.P.A.'s effect on small local groups is well illustrated by the case of the Wimmera Farmers' Accident Benefit and Political Association at Horsham, which joined the national body and changed its name to the Wimmera Farmers' Association in October 1888. Before its connection with the V.F.P.A., its members had met once a month in a flour mill to discuss a surprising range of problems—the establishment of a grain-storage depot at the railway station, the improvement of handling facilities at the Melbourne terminal, the duty on imported ploughshares, the northern irrigation scheme, and so on. The Association sent letters on these topics to the local members of the Victorian Legislative Assembly and to government departments; it also ran a welfare scheme for those of its members who needed assistance either because of illness or damage to their crops. After it had joined the V.F.P.A. its debates became increasingly concerned with issues raised by the Association's national leadership; it adopted the official V.F.P.A. policy of a bounty for exported wheat and took a great interest in proposals to elect farmers' men to Parliament and to support the parliamentary country faction of the day.[45]

One must proceed with caution here, but there are grounds for suggesting that the wave of association-building at the local level set in motion another wave at the sectional and regional levels. Bodies such as the Royal Agricultural Societies of Victoria[46] and of Western Australia dated back to the middle of the century and were institutions catering primarily for the established gentry of the wealthy farming areas near the capital cities. Organizations representing the agricultural frontier appeared only in the seventies and eighties and were usually short-lived, partly because they were highly specialized and partly because there was not the sub-stratum of local associations to

[44] *Age*, 5 Apr. 1888.

[45] *Horsham Times*, 25 Jan., 8 Feb., 5 Apr., 12 Aug., 6 Sept. 1887; 6, 20 Mar., 24 July, 21, 28 Aug., 9, 30 Oct., 13 Nov., 4 Dec. 1888; 8, 22 Jan., 19 Feb., 19 Mar. 1889.

[46] See K. P. Barley, 'A History of Two Victorian Farmers' Organisations. The Royal Agricultural Society and the Chamber of Agriculture', M. Agric. Science Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1952.

give them life. To this category belong such organizations as the Land Law Reformation League (1875) and the Land Law Reform Alliance (1884-5) noted by Martin in New South Wales,[47] the Victorian Farmers' Union of 1879-80, the V.F.P.A. (which petered out in the mid-nineties) and the Queensland Farmers' Alliance, formed in 1891. They were followed by organizations which were more able to strike down roots, such as the New South Wales Farmers and Settlers' Association (1893), the Victorian Chamber of Agriculture (1899), the Queensland Farmers' Union (1911) and the Western Australian Farmers and Settlers' Association (1912). Alongside such general associations there grew up a number of specialized sectional bodies (in Victoria, for example, the nineties saw the formation of the Dairymen's Association (1890), the Fruit Growers' Association (1896) and the Storekeepers and Traders' Association (1900)), whose growth marked an important advance not only in the institutional integration of the agricultural communities, but also in pressure group techniques, for practically all these bodies became adept in the arts of lobbying and political influence. Furthermore, such groups as the New South Wales Farmers and Settlers' Association and the Farmers' League (associated with the Victorian Chamber of Agriculture for a period) were amongst the first to explore seriously the problems of supporting farmers' candidates in the parliamentary elections of the early twentieth century.

Another important strand of organizational experience which affected both the wheat and dairying industries was represented in the co-operative movement. In this field, also, the growth of large-scale bodies followed the gradual build-up of co-operative effort at the local level, as was the case with the Western Australian Producers' Co-operative, formed in 1902,[48] and the New South Wales Farmers and Settlers' Co-operative Association Ltd (1899-1908). Even in South Australia, where the greater maturity of the wheat industry appears to have been accompanied by an earlier period of organization-building than in the other colonies, the South Australian Farmers' Co-operative Union, formed in 1888, had been preceded by smaller local experiments.

Although their industry was geared to the local market and thus did not suffer the difficulties which its expanding export trade created for the wheat industry, dairy farmers too were becoming more sectionally conscious and increasingly resentful of their exploitation by urban interests. The improvement in the technical conditions of dairying, the invention of refrigerated storage, the Babcock test, and the development of factory methods of manufacturing butter and cheese, had provided the basis for a rapid expansion of the industry in the eighties

[47] A. W. Martin, 'Political Groupings in New South Wales 1872-1889, A Study in the Working of Responsible Government', Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1955, pp. 122-3.

[48] John Sandford, *Walter Harper and the Farmers*, pp. xx, 25-6; Mercer, *On Farmers' Service*, pp. 7, 109.

and nineties, and it spread to such regions as the northern rivers of New South Wales, Gippsland, and to the Western District and northern and north-eastern portions of Victoria.[49] National butter production rose from 19,000 tons in 1891 to 86,000 in 1910, and cheese production from 5,000 to 7,000 tons in the same period.[50] Dairy farmers' experiments with the co-operative manufacture of their products and their attempts to establish co-operative trading companies were aimed at doing away with the 'middlemen' who were gaining control of the industry. By 1889 there were a number of co-operative distributing agencies in Sydney, one of which had been formed in 1879 and another in 1881,[51] and from New South Wales the movement spread to New Zealand and Victoria. The founding of a co-operative was regarded as something of an act of defiance, and a great deal of class feeling was often stirred up in the process. For example, the speeches of William Bateman, who attempted in 1897 to form the butter factories of western Victoria into a sellers' co-operative, show little detailed knowledge of the economics of the trade, but they abound in sustained tirades against the 'butter agents' and the 'speculators'. As a report of one of his meetings informs us: 'He was lecturing against middlemen of great capital, and a great power in the way of vested interests.' At Koroit he told his audience that the butter factories paid £50,000 to middlemen for every £1,000,000 worth of butter exported.

> The question might be asked—What work do these men do? They had little huckster shops; and now go to their offices: they are like palaces. Who made them so? You; and you can save the L50,000 by co-operating.[52]

Behind the development of associations and co-operatives lay the farmer's belief that organization would give him power in politics, power to bargain and power to assert his rights. A delegate to one V.F.P.A. convention declared:

> Their great aim was to be in unity, not to 'squibble and split' over small items. They should become, like the Trades Hall Council, a great power, which could dictate to the Government; so strong that the trades should be glad to claim them as partners; so powerful that the Trades Hall would not be able to dictate to them. They well knew that what was suitable for one part of the country was not suitable for another. What suited the Murray would not suit the

[49] *The Australian Dairy Industry, An Economic Study*, ed. N. T. Drane and H. R. Edwards, pp. 27-31.

[50] *Primary Industries, 1956-57, Part I, Rural Industries*, Bulletin No. 51, pp. 95 and 97.

[51] *Age*, 12 Oct. 1889. For a general account of the early dairying industry in New South Wales see *S.M.H.*, 15 Sept. 1892.

[52] *Koroit Sentinel*, 24 Mar. 1897, Goldsbrough Mort Collection, Australian National University Archives, Ref. 2/176/221-5.

> Wimmera. Yet he asked them to consider that they had a common interest. Let them unite and they would be listened to in spite of the Trades Hall or anybody else (Hear, Hear.)[53]

The ideas underlying these sentences stand out clearly: to have allies and power a class must be united and organized; power meant the ability to dictate terms to the government and to other classes, to be 'listened to', to have demands met. This was the philosophy of the big pressure group which played and continues to play such a crucial role in Australian rural politics. It was closely related to the farmer's theory of the state or, more precisely, his theory of Parliament and parliamentary action. He regarded Parliament as the centre of organized power in the state, so that strength in Parliament was valued as a means of competing with other sections or classes for coveted financial resources and of influencing developmental policies, especially in the fields of closer settlement and public works. Localism (that is the rural interest in obtaining concessions for district needs through the local member of Parliament) and regionalism had both bred this attitude to Parliament, an attitude which ignored the importance of other aspects of government. In particular, farmers seem at first not to have realized the value of securing cabinet representation as a means of influencing the administration of policy; and their readiness to see parliamentary parties as representing special interests or hidden *élites* caused them to under-estimate the extent to which large parties were based on a compromise of interests.

Heavy demands were made on a member of Parliament representing a rural constituency. Preferably a 'local man', he was not only required to produce results, in the shape of local roads and bridges, but was expected to live out the role of the honest countryman down to the last gesture and to avoid any suggestion that he had been corrupted by city-bred politicians or persuaded to forsake his principles and his constituents for the sake of office. Burdened with this role, the effective country member always made it a rule to keep in touch with one or two friends in his constituency who would constitute the backbone of his election committee and would have their contacts in each locality, keeping him informed of shifts of opinion and watching for possible rivals. One of the most successful local members was John Moore Chanter from the Riverina. He had taken up business in Moama after a spell of farming in Victoria, became a selectors' champion during the land reform movement, and represented Murray (1885-94) and Deniliquin (1894-1900) in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly before being elected as the federal member for Riverina, a seat which he held, apart from two short intervals, until 1922. Throughout his political career he received consistent support from the Riverina selectors; although a storekeeper, he was treated as one of them and

[53] *Age*, 31 Aug. 1888.

was respected for his integrity and for his ability to bargain hard and fruitfully with ministers and government departments.[54]

Chanter was probably not typical of country members of his time and from the eighties onwards farmers were experimenting with ways of making country members of Parliament keep their election promises. The concern to commit candidates to certain policies and principles before elections disposed farmers to appreciate the value of the Labor Party's pre-selection and pledging techniques, and it was not surprising that these were taken over by the early country parties. In the 1889 Victorian election, for example, the V.F.P.A. conducted selection ballots in some districts to find suitable candidates and required them to pledge support to the Association's platform;[55] and by 1901 some of the branches of the New South Wales Farmers and Settlers' Associations were also requiring candidates whom they supported to endorse the Association's manifesto.

The interest in the integrity of country members was linked with an interest in the activities of the various parliamentary country factions which flourished at this time, most of which were ephemeral groupings lacking the cohesion and extra-parliamentary organization to fight separate election campaigns. As we shall see, at least seven country factions acted out brief roles in Victorian politics between 1886 and 1913 and two important country factions appeared in New South Wales during the same period, one in 1893 and the other in 1902. In Queensland in 1891, M.L.As. from the Darling Downs formed a faction which was later broadened and reconstituted as the Farmers' Political Union. By 1902 another faction based on the Downs members was in existence and in December 1909 a new Farmers' Parliamentary Union was established, like its predecessor a faction within the Liberal Party.[56] Despite their number, however, it would be wrong to place too much importance on such factions, for while the main agrarian issues were land reform and protection, small farmers usually looked upon protectionism as a congenial philosophy and found a place in the alliance of interest groups underlying such broad parties as that of the Protectionists in New South Wales or the Liberals in Victoria. Two factors later combined to alter this situation: the farmers' increasing inclination towards revenue tariffist views which accompanied the development of wheat farming as an export industry, and the hardening of the party system brought about by the growth of the Labor Party after 1900.

In the period just after Labor's rapid electoral expansion between 1901 and 1906 a series of unified non-Labor groups (generally going by

[54] *S.M.H.*, 10 Mar. 1931.

[55] *Age*, 7 Feb., 5, 8, 19 Mar. 1889.

[56] A. A. Morrison, 'The Government of Queensland', *The Government of the Australian States*, ed. S. R. Davis, p. 295; B. A. Knox, 'The Honourable Sir Arthur Morgan, Kt. His Public Life and Work', B.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1956, pp. 42 and 54-64; C. A. Bernays, *Queensland Politics During Sixty (1859-1919) Years*, pp. 147-9; Brisbane *Courier*, 23 Dec. 1909.

the name of Liberal Parties) were formed in Western Australia in 1907, New South Wales in 1908, in Queensland and in the Commonwealth Parliament in 1909 and in South Australia in 1910. From a two-party system based on Free Trade/Protection or Liberal/Conservative dichotomies, Australia had moved by 1910 to a two-party system based on a Liberal/Labor division, in which the Liberal Party enclosed the previously diversified non-Labor strands. Many farmers' organizations welcomed this outcome, for anti-Labor feeling was running high in country districts following rumours that a Labor government would bring agricultural workers under the arbitration system, increase land taxes, favour the leasehold system of land tenure and prevent the alienation of further tracts of Crown land. At the same time, however, the farm groups were uncomfortably aware that their capacity to influence legislation had been substantially reduced and that their power inside the new Liberal Parties was weak compared with that of their traditional enemies, the produce traders and the merchants. As country factions were being formed less frequently and were proving less effective, the rank and file in the farmers' organizations felt that the only answer was to form separate parliamentary country parties and to back them with adequate electoral machinery. This was a step which, while they agreed with it in principle, the conservative agrarian leaders were reluctant to take in case it hindered Liberal efforts to check the advance of the Labor Party—a reluctance which the Liberals fully exploited. But the pressure from small farmers, who were more concerned with third-party action than with defeating the Labor Party, began to tell, particularly during the minor agricultural depression of 1911-14. The formation of the Western Australian Country Party in the State Legislative Assembly in 1914 constituted a decisive breakthrough.

Reduced to its simplest terms, the country party idea was that farmers should return their own members to Parliament, back them with a strong electoral machine, and insist that they support 'measures before men', using their power for concrete results no matter what party's interest was endangered during the bargaining. It was tremendously attractive as an idea, and its attractiveness was increased for Australian farmers by the interest shown in it by American and Canadian agrarian organizations. Its basic elements had been worked out by local ideologues long before it gained general acceptance; in 1887, for example, the founder of the V.F.P.A. told a Horsham audience:

> When this agricultural protection movement is completed we could form a Country Party and be able to obtain what we want. That party would be the leaven which was now wanted in the House, and if we wielded the power we possessed at the next election, we need not any longer have to be going to beg for concessions hat in hand. The Government and its officials will then be our servants instead of masters.[57]

[57] *Horsham Times*, 20 Mar. 1888.

There was a continuous discussion of the problems involved at meetings of local shire councils, agricultural societies and progress associations, and later within broad-based pressure groups such as the Farmers and Settlers' Association of New South Wales and the Victorian Chamber of Agriculture. Although the latter body confined itself as a rule to economic and professional matters, its delegates discussed political subjects informally when they met in hotel lobbies and outside the conference rooms. Writing of the Chamber's 1910 Convention, one reporter noted:

> The exchange of ideas of men from all parts of the State; the feeling of comradeship thus created, and the unity of purpose in dealing with political and economic questions these conditions promote, are of great value. . . . No movement of recent times in Victoria is doing more, indirectly, to impress primary producers with the value of organisation than these annual conventions.[58]

This, then, was the broad situation in which the country party movement began in Australia. In one sense, it was the political projection of a deep-rooted agrarian tradition; in another, it expressed the sectional isolation and insecurity of the wheat industry, with its rapidly growing export trade; in yet another, it was a search for form and structure within a rapidly evolving party system. While this was the movement's general character, it took different directions in different parts of Australia, as we shall see in the chapters that follow.

[58] *Argus*, 12 July 1910.

3

The Country Party Movement Takes Shape

Agrarian Politics in New South Wales before 1910

Farmers made their first decisive impact on New South Wales politics during the land reform movement of the seventies and eighties, when they combined with country townsmen and Sydney liberals to break the grip of the pastoralists over extensive tracts of arable land on the Tablelands and in the Riverina. The struggle, with its moves and counter-moves and its constant shifts in strategy, was like a chess game; the period of important early advances was marked by the Land Acts of 1875 and 1884, which placed the pastoralists and their allies on the defensive; their reply was the Act of 1889 but their final defeat was registered by Carruthers' Act of 1895. At every stage the selectors were forced to experiment boldly with political techniques, and victory found them with a solidly-based organization, the Farmers and Settlers' Association, which they quickly converted into one of the most powerful pressure groups in the colony.

John Robertson's Land Acts of 1861, although designed to promote the subdivision of expiring pastoral leases, in fact did little to encourage closer settlement. By permitting free selection before survey and by preserving the graziers' pre-emptive right to purchase any portion of their leases, the measures enabled graziers to buy the best parts of their runs or to 'peacock' by purchasing the land around the natural waters.[1] When pressure on the land built up in the early seventies, pastoralists resorted increasingly to the practice of purchasing the freehold of their runs at auction sales, at which the upset price was £1 per acre. The Crown Lands (Amendment) Act of 1875 (39 Vic., No. 13) was intended to remove certain abuses such as 'dummying', the appointment of a nominal selector to take up land on a graziers' behalf, but evasion and circumvention of the law continued unchecked.

By the late 1870s, however, agricultural communities had established themselves in the Riverina and on the Central and Northern Tablelands, and the selectors in these places began agitating to have the system changed. They sent petitions to Parliament during the passage

[1] Crown Lands Alienation Act, 1861 (25 Vic., No. 1), Crown Lands Occupation Act, 1861 (25 Vic., No. 2). See D. W. A. Baker, 'The Origins of Robertson's Land Acts', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, VIII, 30, May 1958, pp. 166-82, and Brian Fitzpatrick, *The British Empire in Australia*, 2nd ed., pp. 138-41.

of land bills,[2] backed selectors' men in elections,[3] and formed a number of Associations to further their interests. At Armidale, a Northern Free Selectors' Association had been set up in 1866,[4] the Wagga Free Selectors' Association was established in 1875,[5] while on a national level, a 'Selectors' Conference' was held in 1873, and the Free Selectors' Association held annual meetings between 1877 and 1883.[6] In New South Wales their real chance came in 1882 when the Parkes-Robertson Ministry was defeated and its successor, Sir Alexander Stuart's government, appointed a Commission under Augustus Morris and George Rankin to inquire into land administration. Their report showed that arable land was being alienated to graziers at an alarming rate and recommended steps to check this process.[7] The result was the Crown Lands Act of 1884 (48 Vic., No. 18), which required pastoral lessees to divide their runs into Leasehold and Resumed Areas; the former could be re-leased for prescribed periods while the latter, to be held in future under annual licences, were to be made available for selection. The Act also divided the colony into Western, Central and Eastern Land Divisions, each broken down into Districts administered by Local Land Boards.

The graziers' counter-attack bore fruit in the Crown Lands Act of 1889 (53 Vic., No. 21), the crucial provisions of which were intended to rescue runholders from the obligation, on the expiry of their pastoral leases, to have their properties subdivided under the terms of the 1884 Act. Lessees in the Eastern Division, which enclosed most of the Tablelands, were permitted to retain their holdings under a preferential occupation licence (sec. 33). Runholders in the Western and Central Divisions (the latter included the Riverina) were permitted to apply to Land Boards for extensions of their leases (sec. 43), such applications being referred to the Secretary for Lands and the final decision being left with a new Land Court created under the Act (sec. 8).

Once the implications of the new measure had registered at district level, a new selectors' movement began. Two selectors' conventions were held at Wagga Wagga in the Riverina, one in 1890 and the other in 1892, both of which demanded the abolition of the Land Court, the repeal of the provisions permitting the extension of leases, and legislation providing for the election of members of the Land Boards,

[2] A. W. Martin, 'Political Groupings in New South Wales, 1872-1889', Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1955, p. 122.

[3] See for example D. M. Long, 'A History of the New England Region in the Nineteenth Century', M.A. Thesis, University of Sydney, 1950, p. 154; U. R. Ellis, *The Countryman* (N.S.W.), Sydney, Sept. 1954.

[4] Long, op. cit., pp. 46-55.

[5] W. A. Bayley, *History of the Farmers and Settlers' Association of New South Wales*, p. 31.

[6] Martin, op. cit., pp. 122-3.

[7] *N.S.W. P.P.*, 1883, vol. II, pp. 71-248.

which were often dominated by graziers or their allies.[8] The main drama, however, was being acted out in Parliament, where the selectors' representatives were soon pressing these same demands. At this time, New South Wales politics were dominated by two large parties, the Free Traders and the Protectionists, which had been formed in the late eighties. Most of the agricultural electorates of the Riverina and the Central and Southern Tablelands were Protectionist, and returned such prominent selectors' men as J. Hayes (Hume), J. M. Chanter (Murray), and J. Gormly (Murrumbidgee). When Sir George Dibbs formed a Protectionist Ministry in October 1891, these members hoped that an amending bill would at once be introduced. When the proposed measure was finally circulated early in 1893, they were not satisfied with it and decided to form a 'Country Party', appointing Chanter as its chairman and adopting a manifesto which embodied the selectors' demands.[9] As even this show of strength failed to stir the Dibbs government to take action, a conference of selectors held at Cootamundra in June 1893 formed a permanent organization, the Farmers and Settlers' Association (F.S.A.), with a programme similar to that of the Country Party. Both organizations co-operated in the 1894 election campaign to support selected candidates,[10] but the election resulted in a victory for the Opposition forces, which enabled Sir George Reid to form a Free Trade Ministry. His Secretary for Lands, J. H. Carruthers, almost immediately began to put through the bill which became the Crown Lands Act of 1895 (58 Vic., No. 18) and ostensibly met many of the settlers' demands. Under its provisions, the Governor was empowered to withdraw from pastoral lease any lands in the Central Division required for settlement purposes (sec. 3) and to set aside tracts of Crown land for disposal by way of a new tenure, the homestead selection (sec. 13). Homestead selection areas were to be surveyed before selection, an important advance, and were to be available, after certain requirements had been met, under perpetual lease at an annual rental of 1·25 per cent of the capital value of the holding. Here was a tenure designed for the man with small means whereas the conditional purchase tenure, under which closer settlement had proceeded between 1861 and 1895, involved much higher annual instalments (1s. per acre in payment of a total amount of £1 per acre plus 4 per cent interest), although after ten years it entitled the settler to purchase the freehold of his land.

The reasons which caused the Reid government to put through such a measure are obscure: perhaps the very real distress which the

[8] Bayley, op. cit., pp. 34-43; *S.M.H.*, 21-5 June 1892.

[9] *S.M.H.*, 2, 23 Feb., 17 Mar., 7 Apr. 1893. See also A. W. Martin, 'Free Trade and Protectionist Parties in New South Wales', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, VI, 23, Nov. 1954, pp. 315-23.

[10] Bayley, op. cit., pp. 43-5; *S.M.H.*, 28-30 June, 1 July 1893; 10 Feb., 7, 21 June 1894.

1893-4 financial crisis had caused small farmers would have forced any ministry to take some similar action, or perhaps it was a move designed to win small farmers away from the Protectionist Party. If so, it served its purpose. The Country Party backed the bill, helped the F.S.A. discuss its provisions with Carruthers, and joined with the government in defeating an amendment which would have enabled the pastoralists to retain their expiring leases.[11] It is unlikely, however, that the government intended to enforce the bill very strictly. A member of one of Sydney's large pastoral houses mentioned in a letter in May 1896 that:

> I had a long private chat with Carruthers yesterday, and gathered from him that unless overwhelming evidence of dummyism is thrust upon him, he will not take any further action. In the Mercadool case he contends he had no alternative. . . . He said to me privately —'What can I do when these things are so prominently brought before me.' He assured me he has not, and will not, set inquiry abroad to upset what he knows has been going on since 1861. He further tells me no end of blackmailers have been to him, but he will have nothing to do with them.[12]

Another letter, written in June 1897, mentions that as influence has been brought to bear on Carruthers, he had 'postponed throwing open for selection the 50,000 acres of Crown Lands, things are not so bad . . . as they might be'.[13] Nevertheless, once the measure had become law, the land reform issue receded in importance and the Country Party died away.

In almost every respect, the Chanter Country Party of 1893-4 foreshadowed the principles of action on which the future Country Party was to be based: independent action by a coherent parliamentary group irrespective of party considerations, collaboration with a mass-based pressure group in agitation and in an election campaign, and a deliberate sectional appeal. Yet farmers had not accepted the idea of a permanent country party. For the most part they were satisfied with their representation inside the Protectionist Party (renamed the Progressive Party in May 1901), and once the land issue had lost its immediacy the parliamentary group ceased to exist. The F.S.A. also adapted itself to a new role as a non-partisan pressure group concerned above all with influencing the administration of the 1895 Act and subsequent land legislation; its 1902 Conference actually rejected, by 47 votes to 34, a motion which proposed that the Country Party, led by

[11] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 73, 16 Oct. 1894, p. 1402; *S.M.H.*, 20 Sept., 4 Oct. 1894.

[12] Letter from G. Maiden (manager, Goldsbrough Mort and Co., Sydney) to A. McD. Cooper (general manager, G. M. & Co., Melbourne), 1 May 1896, Goldsbrough Mort Papers, Australian National University Archives, Ref. 2/174/443.

[13] Letter from Cooper to J. S. Horsfall (carbon copy), 3 June 1897, Goldsbrough Mort Papers, A.N.U. Archives, Ref. 2/175/235.

Gormly, be asked to 'advocate the wants' of the F.S.A.[14] This new group, whose platform dealt with land, water-conservation and settlement problems, had attracted eighteen members (ten Progressives, four Independents, three Independent Laborites, and one Liberal)[15] who had agreed to vote together in the Assembly after a majority decision at a party meeting.[16] However, in view of the fact that there was no issue requiring drastic action of the 1893-4 variety, and that the party failed to gain F.S.A. support, it made almost no impact and was well on the way to dissolution by the end of the year.[17]

The strategy of non-partisanship, which the F.S.A. had found so congenial in the late nineties, gradually lost favour in the post-federation period. As the old two party system, based on a Free Trade/Protectionist division, gave way to the new dualism of Liberal *versus* Labor, most social groups, and the farmers especially, came under pressure to choose sides. The 1904 election marked an important point in this transition, both because it registered a significant increase in the electoral and parliamentary strength of the Labor Party and because it led to the formation of a Liberal Party Ministry, with J. H. Carruthers as Premier.[18] Carruthers set himself to consolidate all the non-Labor forces into a united group and by 1908 had absorbed into the Liberal Party the last survivors of the Progressive Party. He also wanted to win the allegiance of the F.S.A., which was at that time troubled by a conflict between those of its members who stood for a leasehold land tenure system and those who advocated the freehold system.

By 1908 the land tenure position was as follows. The settler who wished to secure a freehold property could do so under the conditional-purchase tenure, whose terms had been liberalized by the Crown Lands (Amendment) Act of 1903 (No. 15), and the Closer Settlement Act of 1904 (No. 37), which provided that estates compulsorily resumed for closer settlement should be made available under freehold rather than under leasehold tenure. The only important leasehold tenures were those established by the 1895 Act, namely, the homestead selection and the settlement lease; both had proved quite popular and by 30 June 1908 2,400,623 acres had been let under the former and 5,942,867 under the latter.[19] Lessees enjoyed the advantage of a light rental and the opportunity to invest their capital in machinery and improvements rather than in land, but they complained that banks and private lending agencies were unwilling to accept leasehold properties as adequate securities in making advances. They were also afraid, in some cases, that their rents would be raised following a revaluation of their

[14] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1902, pp. 23, 69-72.

[15] Joan Rydon and R. N. Spann, *New South Wales Politics 1901-1910*, p. 23.

[16] *S.M.H.*, 29 May, 13 June 1902.

[17] E.g. *S.M.H.*, 15 Oct. 1902.

[18] Rydon and Spann, op. cit., Appendix B, p. 133.

[19] *New South Wales Year Book, 1907-08*, pp. 256-7.

holdings. For these reasons some of them asked that the Land Act be amended to permit homestead selectors and settlement lessees to convert their tenures into conditional purchases or conditional leaseholds as a first step to obtaining the freehold of their properties.[20] The issue came to a head in the 1907 election campaign; the Liberal government promised to bring in legislation to make conversion possible, a proposal which the Labor Party attacked, although it assured lessees that it would not, if returned, increase leasehold rentals.[21] The Liberals won the election and in 1908 passed the Crown Lands (Amendment) Act (No. 30) providing for conversions. In the first three years of the Act's operation, 2,122 holders of homestead selections or grants submitted applications for conversion of which 2,017 were granted. As the total number of homestead selectors and grantees on 30 June 1908 would have been just over 9,900,[22] it is obvious that only a small number of settlers, approximately one-fifth of the total, felt strongly enough to apply for the conversion of their leases.

The prominence of the issue, as with the contemporary freehold-leasehold dispute in New Zealand, was not a reflection of its economic importance so much as an indication of a much wider and deeper conflict. The division between freehold and leasehold supporters in the agricultural areas of New South Wales appears to have fallen along the class line between small farmers and large farmers, between agrarian radicals and agrarian conservatives. Social stratification was evident even in the early agrarian communities: at the bottom of the scale was the agricultural labourer; then came the sharefarmer, working another man's land for part of the profits;[23] above him was the small farmer, often using his family for labour; and at the top was the wealthy farmer who owned a large property and employed labour. Class structure and political temper varied from area to area. When the question was raised at the 1907 F.S.A. Conference, one speaker remarked:

> In old settled districts people who had been on the land for years were conservative in their ideas, but in newly settled districts, where some of the settlers had been labourers or shearers, different political views prevailed.[24]

As this man suggested, the difference in outlook between small and large farmers was as much a product of origins as of socio-economic status. According to a retired settler, writing at this time,

[20] See annual reports of the F.S.A. Executive, N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Reports*, 1903, p. 7; 1906, p. 6.

[21] *S.M.H.*, 19 July, 1, 3 Aug. 1907.

[22] *New South Wales Year Books, 1907-08*, p. 256; *1912*, p. 618.

[23] Dunsdorfs (*Wheat-Growing Industry*, p. 245) calculates that the proportion of the wheat area worked by sharefarmers rose from 17 per cent in 1904-5 to 28 per cent in 1914-15. For sharefarming conditions on the Riverina at this time, see *Age*, 14 Jan. 1907.

[24] *S.M.H.*, 10 July 1907.

> The majority of the selectors were farmers who had been driven by wet seasons to emancipate themselves from the thraldom of the unconditional landlord and tenant system on the coast. There were also working men who had saved a little money, an odd storekeeper or city man, bitten with the idea of securing cheap land and becoming agriculturists. Most of the farmers had horses and plant, a few held securities to offer a bank, while among the young fellows were sons of landholders and others willing to back their boys in their struggle with the new country. The selectors who had been wage-earners depended upon getting contract fencing and other work to raise the money to pay their purchase-rents to the State.[25]

Small farmers with little capital were often in favour of the leasehold system and supported the Political Labor League (P.L.L.) in its advocacy of a state bank to issue rural credit. Not only were these men often drawn from working-class groups but they frequently retained a working-class connection, either through relations or, in some cases, through seasonal work at timber mills, gold mines or pastoral stations. An F.S.A. delegate from Jerilderie stated in 1907:

> There were members of his branch who had small holdings, but large families. The sons had to go out into the labour market, and the fathers naturally had sympathy with their children.[26]

The large farmers needed neither the leasehold nor public credit assistance but they used the demand for freehold as their rallying cry because it demonstrated that the institution of the independent yeoman, the hero of the agrarian myth, was being threatened by the Labor Party's leasehold and single-tax policies. The real economic considerations were quickly obscured by such appeals to emotion and sentiment.

Before the land tenure issue burst upon the F.S.A., its pro-Labor members, such as M. M. Ryan, J. L. Trefle and Thomas Brown, had enjoyed considerable influence in its affairs, and though the 1895, 1901 and 1904 conferences had rejected proposals that the Association should confer with the P.L.L.,[27] there was no marked anti-Labor feeling amongst the delegates. The first sign of a change of temper came at the 1905 conference, when Trefle and Brown failed to secure re-election to the executive;[28] but the first open breach was precipitated by a dispute over electoral strategy.

The F.S.A. had always dabbled in elections, and its 1905 conference provided for the selection of F.S.A. candidates at an electoral conference of branch delegates in each constituency.[29] Many members were

[25] C. J. King, 'An Outline of Closer Settlement in New South Wales', *Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics*, xxv, 3-4, Sept.-Dec. 1957, Appendix vii, pp. 269-70.

[26] *S.M.H.*, 10 July 1907.

[27] Bayley, op. cit., p. 46; *S.M.H.*, 9 Aug. 1895; 17 July 1901; 9 June 1904.

[28] *S.M.H.*, 11 Aug. 1905.

[29] Rydon and Spann, op. cit., pp. 11 and 46; *S.M.H.*, 17 Aug. 1905.

shocked, however, when this provision was cited to justify F.S.A. backing for J. Fitzpatrick, the Liberal candidate, in his campaign against W. A. Holman, a prominent Labor leader, in the Cootamundra by-election of July 1906. The Liberals were using the contest as an occasion for bitter anti-Labor propaganda and a considerable body of F.S.A. opinion objected to what Trefle described as 'prostituting the branches of the association to political parties'. In the event, only three of the nine F.S.A. branches in the electorate agreed to back Fitzpatrick, who was defeated by 2,296 votes to 1,863.[30]

However, the Association's executive was pressing a frankly anti-Labor policy, justifying its stand on the grounds that the P.L.L.'s support of a progressive land tax, the leasehold tenure, and a policy of admitting agricultural labourers to the State's industrial arbitration system represented a serious threat to agrarian interests. Trefle decided not to temporize. Supported by other radical members, he put up a hard fight at the Association's 1906 conference, but vote after vote went against him. The delegates approved the support which the executive had given Fitzpatrick, again voted against the radicals in the executive elections, and rejected a motion for a progressive land tax by 89 votes to 19.[31] Small men now began to leave the Association, which became increasingly pro-Liberal and pro-freehold as the months went by. During the Castlereagh by-election of November 1906, in which Trefle was elected to the Legislative Assembly, Holman claimed that the F.S.A. no longer represented genuine farmers but only the 'squattocracy and hangers-on in country towns'.[32] In the course of the 1907 election campaign, the Association's pro-Liberal bias became even more marked and several branches endorsed Liberal candidates.[33] Trefle had by this stage completely broken with the F.S.A., although he had done so reluctantly. Speaking of his decision he said

> I . . . recognise that at the present time a number of democratic settlers who are supporting the Farmers and Settlers' Association are in a difficult and unenviable position. They wish to prove loyal to their association in spite of the fact that it does not now represent the bona-fide small settlers of this country. It is still my hope that the association . . . will . . . settle down once more to its legitimate functions of watching the interest of the bona-fide farmer, and that the small settlers will find it will be to their interest not to weed out of their ranks the labour men, . . . but rather to weed out . . .

[30] H. V. Evatt, *Australian Labour Leader, The Story of W. A. Holman and the Labour Movement*, abridged edition, pp. 131-42; N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1906, pp. 20, 27-8, 40, 57; *Farmer and Settler* (Sydney), 18, 25 July 1906; *S.M.H.*, 11 Sept. 1907 (result).

[31] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1906, pp. 40, 43, 49, 59-64.

[32] *S.M.H.*, 6 Nov. 1906.

[33] The Jerilderie branch pledged its support to the Liberal candidate for Deniliquin (*S.M.H.*, 19 Aug. 1907).

> the monopolists who wish to make a catspaw of the association, and in this way baffle the efforts of the Labour party to break up big estates and settle people upon the land.[34]

By 1908 the F.S.A.'s informal alliance with the Liberal Party had been considerably strengthened, and although some Labor supporters did remain in the Association,[35] many more had left it. By adopting a pro-Liberal policy, it had chosen to swim against the current, for this was the period of Labor's steady advance in the agricultural districts of the Tablelands and Central West, an advance which continued despite the strong fight put up by the parliamentary Labor Party against the passage of the 1908 Conversion Bill. Robert Patten, M.L.C., who became the F.S.A.'s president in 1909, declared that his organization was opposed to the Labor Party on principle.

> They deny us the right to freehold tenure—the basic principle of this association. (Hear, Hear.) And we say that as long as we are an organisation we are going to fight them on that principle. (Cheers.) On the other hand, it does not necessarily follow that because we are opposed to that particular party we are going to . . . be the tail, or a joint in the tail of the other party.[36]

Patten, a wealthy farmer from Comobello in the Central Tablelands,[37] symbolized the new 'respectable' leadership of the F.S.A. He had begun farming in 1897, had been elected to the Association's Executive Council in 1904, and had led the campaign for the freehold land tenure and an alliance with the Liberal Party.

During the F.S.A.'s non-partisan phase, its branch strength had risen steadily from 26 in 1894 to 112 in 1905. Then came a decline to 95 in 1906, perhaps a result of its anti-Labor policy, followed by a number of organizing campaigns which again raised the number of branches to 146 in 1908 and 181 in 1909.[38] The great majority of these were located in the wheat belt, which then formed a long triangle with its base in the Riverina and the Southern Tablelands and its apex in the

[34] *S.M.H.*, 26 July 1907.

[35] The Merriwa delegate to the 1909 conference said that two-thirds of the members of his branch belonged to the Political Labor League (N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1909, p. 44).

[36] Ibid., p. 26.

[37] 'Progress Report of the Royal Commission on the Question of the Marketing of Wheat', Pap. 20, pp. 246-8, *S.A. P.P.*, 1908, vol. II.

[38] Branch figures for this early period are scarce but the following give an impression of the trend:

1894	26	1906	95
1902	92	1908	146
1903	103	1909	181
1905	112		

Sources: Bayley, op. cit., p. 46; N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Reports*, 1903, p. 16; 1908, p. 3; 1909, p. 6; *S.M.H.*, 9 Aug. 1905; 9 July 1907.

New England wheat districts of Armidale and Inverell. Some of the branches, such as Brookong (Riverina), were large and active, with perhaps one hundred members,[39] and constituted important centres of political strength; others were small and insignificant. In all, the Association's total membership in 1908 was estimated to be between 4,000 and 5,000.[40] The great rallying point of the year was the annual conference, held in Sydney from 1905 onwards, a gathering which served not only for the election of officers and the formulation of policy, but as an informal sorting-house for ideas and information. In its first fifteen years of existence, the Association had developed considerable influence as a pressure group in matters affecting land, local government, railways and water conservation;[41] a head office had been established in 1902, an official journal, the *Farmer and Settler*, in 1906, and by 1908 a system of district councils was being set up. Its objects, as Patten told a South Australian Royal Commission in 1908, were:

> simply to safeguard the interests of all the men on the land and to see that the laws of the land are not too harshly framed with regard to their conditions, and generally to interest ourselves in the welfare of land settlement. It is true that it is a semi-political organisation, but all organisations are political. We hope to help to bring in amending laws as well as to guide future legislation.[42]

Alignment with the Liberals, however, was raising serious problems of strategy for Patten and the Association's conservative membership. They were well aware of the danger that their organization might become a part of the Liberal Party's electoral machine and lose its freedom of action. Meanwhile, the idea of forming a parliamentary country party based on the electoral support of the F.S.A. was already finding favour amongst a section of the membership, and A. K. Trethowan, who later became the main exponent of the country party idea in the Association, succeeded at the 1908 conference in gaining approval for a motion declaring that the F.S.A. should become 'a straight-out political body'. The delegates, however, refused to add the phrase 'with parliamentary representation'.[43] At the 1909 conference, the executive was given authority to confer with other organizations to secure the return to Parliament 'of representatives favourable to the

[39] T. I. Campbell said that the branches ranged in size from 10 to 180 members ('Progress Report of the Royal Commission on the Question of the Marketing of Wheat', Pap. 20, p. 270, Q. 7123, *S.A. P.P.*, 1908, vol. II) but John Perry, then president, gave the maximum as 230 members (ibid., p. 256, Q. 6858).

[40] Ibid., p. 249, Q. 6762.

[41] See 'Farmers & Settlers' Association of New South Wales, What It Has Done', Sydney, [1955].

[42] 'Progress Report of the Royal Commission on the Question of the Marketing of Wheat', Pap. 20, p. 249, Q. 6762, *S.A. P.P.*, 1908, vol. II.

[43] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1908, pp. 64-5.

policy of the Association'[44] but this was interpreted in the 1910 State and Federal elections to mean F.S.A. support for Liberal candidates.

All this time, however, the economic circumstances of the wheat industry were steadily alienating farmers from their Liberal allies. In 1898, New South Wales became an exporter of wheat; by 1910 she was sending abroad two-fifths of her harvest. The State's wheat acreage grew from 357,000 in 1891 to 2,381,000 in 1911, the biggest expansion occurring in the Riverina and the Western Slopes, the most important centres of F.S.A. branch strength. From a concern with land settlement and protection, farmers became more interested in the regulation of the rapidly expanding wheat export market, and problems connected with this were discussed at F.S.A. conferences from 1895 onwards.[45] In 1908, the collapse of the Farmers and Settlers' Co-operative Association Limited, formed in 1899, left the organization face to face with marketing problems which were growing more serious at every harvest. As Patten told the 1908 Royal Commission:

> There is a great deal of dissatisfaction, particularly this year, amongst New South Wales farmers with respect to the methods of marketing wheat. It is chiefly because there seems to be such a margin of difference between the growers' price and the merchants' price, and there does not seem to be any particular bridge to span that difference.[46]

This was dissatisfaction, moreover, produced during a period of rising prices. When prices began to fall, as they did in the 1909-10 and 1910-11 seasons, dissatisfaction turned into a militancy which expressed itself in a demand for tariff reduction as a means of cutting down local costs, accompanied by a growing demand for a reform of the marketing system. Both these demands were resisted by the Liberal Party; both, in consequence, disposed the F.S.A. to experiment further with the possibility of forming a separate country party.

Agrarian Politics in Victoria before 1910

The land reform movement in Victoria was directed essentially towards keeping selectors on the land rather than towards wresting land from the pastoralists, who were much less of a power than they were in New South Wales. No attempt was made to prolong pastoral leases by the devices invented in the northern colony; as they expired they were resumed for closer settlement, with the result that the average acreage under pasture declined in Victoria fron 30·9 million in 1862-6 to 24·3 million in 1872-6.[47]

[44] Ibid., 1909, pp. 42-5.

[45] *S.M.H.*, 9 Aug. 1895, 24 Aug. 1898, 19 Aug. 1899.

[46] 'Progress Report of the Royal Commission on the Question of the Marketing of Wheat'.

[47] 'Report of the Crown Lands Commission of Inquiry . . .', Pap. 73, p. xvi, *V.P.P.*, 1879-80, vol. III.

The major problem affecting the Victorian land settlement programme was that of finding a way to ensure that the financial burden on the new settler, who was expected to purchase the freehold of his land as well as bring it into production, was not excessive. The Land Act of 1860 (24 Vic., No. 117) provided for survey before selection at a uniform upset price of £1 per acre, disputed blocks being auctioned; a selector could pay the whole or half the purchase price, in the latter case agreeing to pay an annual rental of 1s. per acre. A first step towards easing these provisions was taken by the Amending Land Act of 1865 (28 Vic., No. 237) which introduced the principle of the pre-purchase period, in this case three years, during which the selector paid an annual rental of 2s. per acre and effected improvements to the value of 20s. per acre within two years; at the end of three years he could either purchase the freehold at £1 per acre or offer the lease for auction. The Land Act of 1869 (33 Vic., No. 360) went even further by providing that the rental of the pre-purchase period should be deducted from the purchase price and that the latter could be paid over an additional seven years at the usual rate of 2s. per acre; but this Act, which was also designed to cut down speculation in land, provided more exacting conditions of residence and improvement.

With the imposition in 1868 of a duty on imported grains, fixed first at 9d. per cwt and raised to 1s. per cental in 1872,[48] grain prices rose on the Melbourne market and a period of agricultural expansion began. Between 1873 and 1879 land was selected at a rate of over one million acres per annum,[49] and the colony's wheat production rose between 1870-1 and 1880-1 from 2,870,000 to 9,727,000 bushels. The credit for this expansion came mainly from short-term private loans, which fell due for repayment at a time when poor crops and droughts had reduced the new settlers' incomes. A Royal Commission which toured the agricultural areas in 1878 found that large numbers of selectors were heavily indebted to storekeepers, bankers and moneylenders, some of whom had been charging an interest rate of more than 10 per cent. The Commissioners estimated that probably one-third of the settlers were in danger of losing their land through inability to pay their debts, that almost one-fifth of the lessees had taken out mortgages, and that one-fourth of the total acreage of land selected under the 1869 Act had been thus affected.[50] Their report led to the Amending Land Act of 1878 (42 Vic., No. 634) which increased the pre-purchase period from three to six years and reduced the annual rental per acre from 2 . to 1s., thereby easing the pressure on the new men, and allowing this first phase of agricultural development to work

[48] Dunsdorfs, *Wheat-Growing Industry*, p. 165.

[49] 'Report of Proceedings . . . during the Year ending 31st December, 1882', Pap. 17, p. 3, *V.P.P.*, First Session, 1883.

[50] 'Crown Lands Commission of Inquiry. Progress Report . . .', Pap. 65, p. 5, *V.P.P.*, 1878, vol. III.

itself out without further incident. By 1888 a total of 105,184 selectors had taken up 15,059,254 acres under the 1869 and 1878 Acts compared with the 4,679,251 acres alienated by selectors under the 1860 and 1865 Acts.[51]

Many of the contrasts between agrarian politics in Victoria and New South Wales can be traced to the different course taken by the land reform movement in each colony. Selectors' evidence given before the 1878 Land Commission suggests that Victorian farmers bore little animosity towards pastoralists but profoundly disliked those bankers, grain merchants and land speculators who had exploited them during the pioneering period. However, they were prepared to co-operate in politics both with graziers and with such storekeepers and newspaper proprietors as they trusted. Bartlett tells us that though the Victorian Farmers' Union of 1879-80 was predominantly a selectors' movement, it also received some support from pastoralists and storekeepers;[52] and the early country factions in Victoria were open to all members representing rural constituencies. Several candidates in the 1886 election who advocated the formation of a country party felt that it should be formed:

> not as against Melbourne, but simply to secure to the country districts a prompt recognition of their claims, and to see that a fair proportion of revenue was expended in public works throughout the colony.[53]

When a country faction was formed on 30 June 1886 under the leadership of Walter Madden (Wimmera), it declared itself open to all members except those from Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Sandhurst (which was later renamed Bendigo) resolving that:

> the objects of the country party shall be to watch over and protect the *bona fide* country interest, irrespective of party, and by mutual help to assist in forwarding administration and legislation intended for the benefit of country interests.[54]

Such factions found it relatively easy to establish a place for themselves in the Victorian party system. The differences between the Conservative and Liberal Parties had become blurred after the formation of a coalition government in 1883, and by 1886, when the ministry was headed by Duncan Gillies (Conservative) and Alfred Deakin (Liberal), the old distinction had virtually ceased to count. Several members called themselves Conservatives and Free Traders, others identified themselves as Liberals and Protectionists, but the main divi-

[51] 'Report of Proceedings . . .', Pap. 85, p. 3, *V.P.P.*, 1889, vol. III.

[52] G. R. Bartlett, 'Organisations and Elections in Victoria, 1864-86', Seminar Paper, Department of History, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University, 10 Apr. 1963, p. 7.

[53] *Age*, 18 Feb. 1886. See also 16 Feb. 1886.

[54] Ibid., 1 July 1886.

sion in the Legislative Assembly became that between Ministerialists and Oppositionists, with a mixture of Conservatives and Liberals on both sides. Given the fluidity of party lines, members had no difficulty in forming groups to press the claims of the mining companies, the liquor or temperance interests, or the Decentralization League, to name a few. The 1886 session had barely begun when a reporter noted that: 'The process of subdividing the Legislative Assembly into a number of small coteries, each devoted to the promotion of some special interest, is rapidly progressing.'[55]

Seen in this context, the appearance of Walter Madden's Country Party was no unusual event. It was basically a farmers' faction which met on at least four occasions in 1886 to discuss such things as the removal of the duty on cornsacks, the need for greater speed in the issuing of selectors' leases and licences, and the gristing in bond of New Zealand wheat for export as Victorian flour. Attendance appears to have ranged between 14 and 25 at meetings, although later estimates of the faction's strength vary between 43 and 48 in an 86-member Assembly. The group finally disbanded after a dispute in October 1886 between its free-trade and protectionist wings.[56]

Protectionism and free trade in rural Victoria marked the difference between developed and under-developed regions. The economic confidence of the pastoral west and of the established farming regions near Melbourne was expressed in their belief in the open market and their opposition to further extensions of public activity in developing the colony's hinterland. On the other hand, the insecurity of the new regions, the Wimmera, the Goulburn Valley, the north-east and East Gippsland, dictated their interest in protection against imports of primary produce from neighbouring colonies, in sustained expenditure on public works development, and, in the north, on the irrigation programme.[57] The Victorian Farmers' Protection Association (V.F.P.A.), established at conventions held in Melbourne in November 1887 and April 1888, was essentially a northern and eastern venture and represented two concrete demands, one for an increased stock tax and the other for tariff and bounty assistance to the agricultural industries. Small graziers complained that the original stock tax, imposed in 1877, had not prevented sheep and cattle from New South Wales and Queensland reaching the local market in a steady flow, and they called for a new levy of 25 per cent *ad valorem* on all imported stock and meat. Farmers wanted the duty on imported cereals raised from 2s. to 3s. per cental and exported wheat subsidized to the extent of 1s. per bushel,

[55] Ibid., 16 July 1886.

[56] Ibid., 1, 22 July, 12 Aug., 21 Oct. 1886; *V.P.D.*, vol. 57, 22 Aug. 1888, pp. 755-6; 29 Aug. 1888, pp. 864-5.

[57] This distinction is made by C. P. Kiernan, 'Political Parties in the Victorian Legislative Assembly 1901-1904', B.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1954.

for despite the fact that the wheat industry had exported one-fourth of its output in the 1881-5 period it was uncertain of its ability to expand this trade without public assistance and tariff protection.[58]

James Coldwell, the V.F.P.A.'s founding president, spent the winter of 1888 touring the north and east forming branches, and he also began a journal, the *Farmers' Gazette*, which failed to gain acceptance. The Association's second convention, of April 1888, adopted a constitution providing for an executive whose sixteen members were to be drawn from five regional zones, and established a levy of 1s. per member on the branches. Although the convention reaffirmed the Association's interest in increased protection, it also discussed the desirability of a state bank and the possibility of the co-operative export marketing of wheat. During the 1888 session of Parliament, the V.F.P.A. took a close interest in the activities of two country factions—that led by Madden and another, claiming to be protectionist, headed by G. W. Hall and George Graham (the members for Moira) in a campaign for the stock tax and for other concessions.[59] Both these groups were critical of the Premier's budget statement, in which he maintained that an increased stock tax would hinder the federation movement by harming relations with New South Wales and that farmers, instead of producing a wheat surplus and calling for export bounties, should diversify their crops with the object of making Victoria agriculturally self-sufficient.[60] At first the country factions were not willing to meet this challenge directly and only a handful of their members voted for an Opposition motion censuring the Government for these and other failings, but during the Committee discussions on the budget they did vote with the Opposition in favour of an increased stock tax.[61] The Premier, Duncan Gillies, immediately grew angry, withdrew the budget (which had provided for a number of agricultural bonuses), and refused to have anything to do with the stock tax proposal.

It was to alter the government's attitude that the V.F.P.A. decided at its November convention to intervene in the impending election campaign, advising its branches to support candidates who endorsed a manifesto embodying the Association's tariff demands.[62] However, though its branch strength at this time was about two hundred,[63] the V.F.P.A.'s impact on the election of 28 March 1889 was inconsiderable. In some electorates, such as Borung,[64] the branches took great care in selecting candidates; in others they agreed to support sitting members even though the latter had expressed opposition to some of the mani-

[58] *Age*, 3 Nov. 1887; 5, 7 Apr. 1888.

[59] Ibid., 5, 6 July 1888.

[60] *V.P.D.*, vol. 57, 24 July 1888, pp. 538-9.

[61] Ibid., and vol. 58, 13 Sept. 1888, pp. 1090-1.

[62] *Age*, 8 Nov. 1888; 7 Feb. 1889 (the manifesto was given in ibid., 9 Nov. 1888).

[63] Ibid., 17 Aug. 1888.

[64] Ibid., 5 Mar. 1889.

festo's major planks.[65] From this point onwards, in fact, the V.F.P.A.'s influence steadily declined; it changed its name to the Victorian Farmers' Association in 1891 but its last few conferences were little more than Show Week gatherings.[66]

Nevertheless, parliamentary country groups continued to appear. During the 1889 session, Allan McLean (Gippsland South) led a faction which tried to persuade the Gillies government to increase duties on imported grain and stock, but his support fell away when he expressed these demands in a hostile motion, which the government defeated by 52 votes to 21.[67] Another 'Country Party' was formed in October 1891[68] to protest against the proposed abolition of plural voting; it issued a programme during the 1892 election,[69] was reconstituted at the beginning of the new session of parliament, but gradually faded away.[70] Yet another country group was formed after the 1894 election,[71] but this also did not hold together for long. Then followed six years in which the convention of country factions fell into disuse.

It was at the turn of the century, when the Victorian party system was passing through a period of flux, that we find the country party idea restored to favour. In November 1899, Sir George Turner's Liberal government was defeated by a combination of the Conservative Opposition and about twenty of its own dissident supporters led by Allan McLean. McLean formed a ministry which was itself voted out of office after the election of 1 November 1900, when a new Liberal government took power, led first by Turner and later by Alexander Peacock, and supported by the small parliamentary Labor Party. By 1901 the dissident Liberals and the Conservatives had merged to form a united opposition under the leadership of William Irvine, who later identified himself with the protest (if not the concrete demands) of the Kyabram reform movement and who, in June 1902, succeeded in defeating the Peacock Ministry. Irvine then formed a cabinet of his own, obtained a dissolution after a minor defeat in the Assembly, and was returned in the election of 1 October 1902 with a large majority. He was succeeded as Premier in February 1904 by Sir Thomas Bent, who remained in power until January 1909. Under Irvine and Bent developmental work, especially in the north and east, was pushed ahead vigorously; policy in respect of closer settlement was rationalized under the Lands Purchase and Management Board, established in 1904; irrigation and water conservation schemes were brought under

[65] E.g. J. L. Dow (Kara Kara), ibid., 15 Mar. 1889; Walter Madden (Horsham), ibid., 19 Mar. 1889.

[66] Ibid., 27, 29 Aug. 1891; 25 Aug. 1892; 31 Aug., 1 Sept. 1893; 31 Aug. 1894.

[67] *V.P.D.*, vol. 61, 27 Aug. 1889, p. 1146. See also *Age*, 7 June, 10 July, 7, 20, 21 Aug. 1889.

[68] *Age*, 8, 14 Oct. 1891.

[69] Ibid., 10 Feb. 1892.

[70] Ibid., 5, 12 May 1892.

[71] Ibid., 3, 5 Oct. 1894.

the control of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, formed in 1905; and the founding of the Department of Agriculture in 1906 marked a new advance in the provision of technical and scientific advice for Victorian farmers.[72]

Although C. P. Kiernan exaggerates the city-orientation of the Turner-Peacock Liberals and the rural-orientation of the Irvine-Bent party (which he terms the Liberal Country Party), he has rightly drawn attention to the importance of the latter group's appeal to the less developed areas of northern and eastern Victoria.[73] Despite the fact that their supporters included a number of Melbourne and large-town members, Irvine and Bent were able to win the support of the countryside as few Premiers had before them. But their programme was a vague one and, apart from a brief liaison between Irvine and the Citizens' Reform League in 1902, neither made much attempt to develop either an organization or a regional base which would strengthen the Liberal Party's rural identity. The real precursors of the Country Party proper were the country factions which flourished as wings of the established parties between 1900 and 1902. The first of this series was that formed by M. K. McKenzie in November 1900 as a group inside the McLean Opposition to counteract the alleged domination of the Turner Liberal government by City and Trades Hall interests.[74] By November 1901 a rival faction, led by J. W. Taverner (Donald and Swan Hill), had sprung up within the Liberal Party,[75] but its members came increasingly under the influence of the Irvine Opposition, particularly after the spread of the Kyabram movement and the formation of the Citizens' Reform League. In fact, the Peacock Ministry's defeat in June 1902 was due to the defection of several of its country supporters, including Taverner and several other members of his faction;[76] and both Taverner and McKenzie were given places in the ministry which Irvine then formed. The remainder of both country factions joined forces in a united 'Country Party' in August 1902, and to avoid the disruptive effect of having office-seekers for leaders, they decided that the chairmanship of their group should rotate and that control be in the hands of a nine-member committee.[77] By 1903, however, the faction had ceased to be a subject of political interest.

The confusion of the early years of the decade gradually gave way to order. A united Liberal Party was formed in February 1907, the Labor Party, which had been the official Opposition since 1904, increased its strength in the election of 15 March 1907, and in June a new 'Country Party' emerged. The latter occupied itself with prob-

[72] F. W. Eggleston, *State Socialism in Victoria*, pp. 33-4, 58.

[73] Kiernan, 'Political Parties in the Victorian Legislative Assembly', pp. 2-4, 19-20.

[74] *Age*, 16 Nov. 1900.

[75] Ibid., 22 Nov. 1901.

[76] *V.P.D.*, vol. 100, 3 June 1902, pp. 59-60.

[77] *Age*, 24, 31 July, 1, 6 Aug. 1902.

lems of closer settlement, irrigation, water supply, rural education, railway freight charges and so on; sub-committees of the 'Party' were appointed to deal with special items; ministers were interviewed; and the members met as often as possible.[78] In 1908, however, the faction was involved by its leaders in the intrigues which marked the last months of the Bent régime. The trouble began over the government's Land Valuation Bill, which many country members felt was the first step towards a land tax on improved values.[79] Anticipating that the country faction would vote against him on the second reading, Bent had the bill discharged from the notice paper on 30 September and announced that he would bring forward a new bill.[80] This move confused his rivals and gave him time to negotiate. He made his decisive move on 27 October when he secured the adjournment of the Assembly for three weeks on the grounds that he wanted to reconstruct his ministry; it emerged later that Bent had won over a majority of the country faction by offering it four cabinet posts and by promising to drop the second Land Valuation Bill.[81] The anti-Bent members of the group met on 18 November to replace those officials who had been 'elevated'. They agreed that the country faction should join forces with a dissident Liberal group, led by John Murray,[82] and supported him when in early December he moved a censure motion against the government. The motion was carried, with Labor Party backing, by 37 votes to 25.[83] Bent obtained a dissolution, lost the election, and was succeeded as Premier by Murray in January 1909.

Looking back over the period under review, we can see that in Victoria parliamentary country factions appeared in waves, or series, between 1886-9, 1891-4, 1900-2 and 1907-8, but it would be wrong to describe them as unsuccessful attempts to form a permanent country party. These country factions sprang from an institutional tradition which set strict limits to their fields of operation; most country members regarded them as being, ideally, informal parliamentary committees with special competence in spheres of legislation involving rural interests—land settlement, irrigation, some tariff items, railways policy and the like. They were not expected to act in Parliament like independent political parties—on the contrary, they were expected to devote themselves to the mundane work of collecting and assembling information about rural topics, arranging deputations to ministers and heads of departments, and lobbying whenever opportunity offered. They were valued most highly when their members included representatives from both sides of the House—hence the resentment aroused

[78] Ibid., 18-20 June 1907.

[79] Ibid., 24 and 29 Sept. 1908.

[80] *V.P.D.*, vol. 119, 30 Sept. 1908, pp. 938-41.

[81] Ibid., 27 Oct. 1908, pp. 1364-90; *Age*, 28 Oct., 10 Dec. 1908.

[82] *Age*, 19 Nov. 1908.

[83] *V.P.D.*, vol. 119, 3 Dec. 1908, p. 1785; *Age*, 3 Dec. 1908.

when leaders of country factions used their position to make a bid for a cabinet place. In this respect Allan McLean in 1889, Taverner and McKenzie in 1902, and Bowser and Downward in 1908, broke the accepted code. The values which the ordinary member attached to the factions came out clearly in A. C. Groom's letter to McLean explaining his withdrawal from the 1889 faction.

> When this country party was first formed a number of opposition members were included in it, and it was particularly stated at our first meeting that the party should have no political significance whatever. . . . it was agreed that we should unite together to do the best we possibly could for the farmers.[84]

Rural communities, however, regarded the 'country parties' as being much more than parliamentary committees and pressure groups; for them they were symbols of farmers' political separatism, and a great deal of interest was shown in their crusade for rural causes in Parliament. When the 1888 factions vacillated in the face of the Opposition's challenge to make an issue of the stock and grain duties question, they were sharply criticized at meetings throughout the countryside; when McLean made his quixotic charge at the stock-tax windmill in 1889, he became the hero of the V.F.P.A. branches while his detractors, such as Groom, were labelled turncoats. It is clear, however, that the factions were regarded by farmers as failures. They looked for an independent party supporting, in G. W. Hall's phrase, 'measures, not men',[85] and they saw the remedy for previous failures in an imitation of the Labor Party's policy of binding members of Parliament by pledges and by submitting the parliamentary group to the supervision of an outside body. By 1920 this theory had become an *idée fixe* with the Victorian Farmers' Union, one of whose officers wrote:

> During the long years the primary producers have been returning country candidates for country seats, and on occasions there have been formed 'country' parties or groups in the State Legislature. But these 'country parties' have never had a long lease of life, and have never had anything like a well defined course of action with a view to permanent existence and continuous service. . . . Without a signed pledge, or some other gaurantee [*sic*], . . . there is no assurance of cohesion in the V.F.U. Country Party, and it would have no better prospect of continuance and permanence than have been the fleeting careers of the aforetime country groups. . . . the probabilities would be that the members of the Party would be spending more time caballing and plotting with a view to the attainment of office and individual advancement rather than proceeding in a compact group towards the realisation of their platform and policy.[86]

[84] A. C. Groom to Allan McLean, 19 Aug. 1889. *V.P.D.*, vol. 61, 22 Aug. 1889, pp. 1089-92; see also Walter Madden, ibid., vol. 60, 13 Aug. 1889, pp. 981-5.

[85] *Age*, 23 Mar. 1889.

[86] *Farmers' Advocate*, 1 Apr. 1920.

Although no body comparable to the F.S.A. of New South Wales emerged in Victoria before World War I, the Chamber of Agriculture formed in 1899-1900[87] revived some of the militancy which had died with the V.F.P.A. in the early nineties, and proved to be a much more efficient agricultural pressure group than its predecessor, the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria. Even so, several rural organizations felt that the Chamber was not sufficiently aggressive,[88] and a movement began in the Goulburn Valley in October 1901 which ended in the formation, at a Shepparton conference in July 1902, of the Victorian Farmers and Rural Producers' Association.[89] This, however, lasted no more than two months before merging with the Chamber.[90] In January 1904, another group, the Farmers, Property Owners and Producers' League (Farmers' League), was formed for the purpose of supporting 'anti-Socialist' candidates in election campaigns. At first it was intended that this should operate as a political wing of the Chamber but the two organizations chose to remain separate.[91]

The League's identification with free trade and anti-Labor interests, established during its forceful intervention on behalf of G. H. Reid's forces during the 1906 federal election campaign, made it unpopular in the northern and eastern farming districts where protectionism remained strong, and it was rarely active outside election periods. Even so, by 1910 its nominal membership was 15,000 and its branch strength 240.[92] Although it never tried to establish a separate country party, and in fact declared for a two-party system of socialist and anti-socialist groups,[93] it nevertheless gave invaluable organizational and electioneering experience to hundreds of political activists in the country, many of whom later served in the People's Party (1910-17) and later still the Victorian Farmers' Union.

The differences in agrarian politics between New South Wales and Victoria had become quite marked by 1910, and were to produce the contrasts between the country parties of the two States. We have already noted that farmers in Victoria were not at odds with the graziers but were more hostile to country townsmen than most New South Wales farmers. To this may be added a further contrast; the Labor Party was much stronger in rural New South Wales before World War I than it was in rural Victoria. At a time when the wheat-belt and tableland country of New South Wales had become disputed territory in Labor's drive to push the Liberals back to the coastal regions, the Victorian Labor Party had still not broken out beyond

[87] *Age*, 7 Sept. 1899; Barley, 'A History of Two Victorian Farmers' Organisations', p. 12.

[88] See the conference of Sept. 1900, *Age*, 7 Sept. 1900.

[89] Ibid., 2-4 July 1902; Barley, op. cit., p. 13.

[90] *Age*, 5 Sept. 1902.

[91] Ibid., 1, 2 July 1904; 2 Sept., 3 Nov. 1904.

[92] *Argus*, 26 Jan. 1910.

[93] *Age*, 15 Aug. 1906.

Melbourne, the central goldmining seats, Port Fairy in the west and Gippsland North in the east. In the northern and eastern farming districts, well beyond the battle zone, the old war between free traders and protectionists still flickered from time to time—but there was nothing to compare with the intensity of class feeling generated by the leasehold-freehold controversy in New South Wales. There the F.S.A.'s conservative leadership, using their organization as an electoral guerilla force for the Liberal Party, were prepared to alienate the support of many agrarian radicals and small farmers, who were thus lost to the country party movement at an early stage. But the agrarian radicals in Victoria remained within the orbit of non-Labor politics and during World War I helped to found and orient the Victorian Farmers' Union, which was far more to the left than the country party organizations in other States.

The Country Party Movement Gathers Force, 1910-1914

It is one of the paradoxes of Australian political history that the first determined attempts to form country parties with permanent electoral organizations occurred at the very time that the Liberal Parties were trying to establish a united front to resist the advance of the labour movement. Labor in 1910 won the federal, New South Wales and South Australian elections, and in 1911 gained power in Western Australia as well. Having strengthened their organization, the Liberals tried to counter-attack, but although they won the 1913 federal election by one seat, they were again defeated in 1914. Moreover, their efforts to promote non-Labor solidarity were not succeeding; farmers' associations in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia became interested in the country party idea and asserted their right to contest elections as an independent force. Eight farmers' members were returned in the Western Australian election of 21 October 1914 and subsequently formed a country party in the Legislative Assembly. These two events—Labor's rise to power in the Commonwealth and three States, and the upsurge of the country party movement—were closely related, but in a complicated way.

At first the farmers' associations had identified themselves wholeheartedly with attempts to keep Labor in check. The Farmers' and Primary Producers' Unions of South Australia, for example, were founded 'to try and stem the tide of socialism which was sweeping over the world',[94] an ambition which was shared by the Farmers' Association of Queensland,[95] the Farmers' League of Victoria, and the New South Wales F.S.A. In August 1906 these four groups and the Country Progress Association of Western Australia met in Sydney to establish a Commonwealth Farmers' Organisation (C.F.O.), and declared:

[94] W. H. Hall, *S.M.H.*, 12 July 1907.

[95] Brisbane *Courier*, 2-3 Aug. 1906.

> Acquired rights in land and capital, machinery and money necessary for exchange purposes are boldly threatened by the political Labor Party organisations in their declared objective—the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, in order to establish 'a co-operative Commonwealth' of industrial workers, directed by bureaucratic officialdom, under the control of an elective Parliament.
>
> Therefore we, representing the landowners and land users, oppose that 'objective,' and declare in favor of the principle of private ownership in land and capital.[96]

The efforts which were then being made to form united Liberal Parties met with their approval, and the fusion of the federal non-Labor parties, achieved under Deakin's leadership in 1909, prompted the C.F.O. to applaud 'the establishment of a broad two-party system—the United Liberal Party opposing the Socialistic party . . .'[97]

Associations such as these represented mainly the views of the wealthy and established farmers, and the Labor Parties were surprisingly successful in winning the support of small farmers, especially in New South Wales and Western Australia. Only when they took power, and began to pursue unpopular policies, did that support begin to weaken and the power of the anti-Labor organizations increase in farming areas. The Federal Labor government's Land Tax Act of 1910, although it affected only landed properties with an unimproved value of over £5,000, frightened many of the small settlers, who were encouraged to see it as a first step towards the nationalization of farms in the interests of Trades Hall bosses.[98] A similar interpretation was placed on the New South Wales Labor government's attempt to abolish the 1908 Conversion Act and on the Western Australian ministry's advocacy of the leasehold tenure. A great deal of prominence was given by the country press to the Labor Parties' policy of bringing agricultural as well as pastoral labourers within the arbitration system, as indicated by the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1910 and the New South Wales Industrial Disputes Act of 1911. When the Federal Labor government, in both 1911 and 1913, submitted to referendum proposals to increase Commonwealth control over intra-state trade and commerce, corporations, combines and monopolies, and wages and conditions of employment, most farmers' organizations opposed them as preparations for socializing the economy.[99]

[96] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1906, p. 94. See also pp. 67-70, and Ian Campbell, 'Groups, Parties and Federation', *Groups in Theory and Practice*, p. 74.

[97] *Argus*, 26 Jan. 1910.

[98] E.g. R. G. S. Williams, *Australian White Slaves* (Sydney, 1911), pp. 105-13.

[99] Conrad Joyner, *The Commonwealth and Monopolies*, pp. 22-4. See also Joyner, *Holman versus Hughes, Extension of Australian Commonwealth Powers*; 'Attempts to Extend Commonwealth Powers, 1908-1919', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, IX, 35, Nov. 1960, pp. 295-307.

The strength of anti-Labor feeling in farming regions enabled such Liberal Party agencies as the Liberal Union of South Australia and the Liberal League of Western Australia to build up their strength outside the main cities, and in Victoria a People's Party was organized by the Liberals as a specifically country association. For the most part, however, small farmers remained apart from the main parties, and such associations as the New South Wales F.S.A. retained a large measure of political independence. Farmers began to organize in earnest in 1912, but to meet an industrial rather than a political challenge. In December 1911 the Rural Workers' Union (R.W.U.) had sent out a circular letter requesting employers of agricultural and dairy workers to agree to a specified log of wages and conditions of work and pointing out that, if the employers refused to accept the log, an application for an award would be made to the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court.[1] The employers' cause was taken up in New South Wales by the F.S.A., but in the other States new organizations were formed—the Farmers and Settlers' Association of Western Australia, the Rural Producers' Association of Victoria, and the Farmers' Union of Queensland. Those in the eastern States formed a Federal Defence Committee of the Primary Producers of Australia, but their efforts came to an end when the R.W.U., which had not received the backing of the powerful Australian Workers' Union, decided against arguing its case before the Arbitration Court.[2]

In their efforts to mobilize support, however, the new organizations had made contact with the broad strata of small farmers which had for so long been politically inaccessible. By 1914 the F.S.A. of Western Australia had 180 branches and 6,000 members, and the Q.F.U. 280 branches and 14,000 members. The New South Wales F.S.A. had also grown; its branch strength rose from 181 in 1909 to 373 in 1912, and its revenue from membership subscriptions (at 5s. per member) increased from £1,213 in 1911 to £1,880 in 1914.[3] At first the new members remained passive, but by 1913 and 1914 they were demanding that the bodies that had adopted them should nominate independent candidates in elections and, if possible, form farmers' parties in Parliament. Political institutions which had at first appeared likely to become

[1] Mercer, *On Farmers' Service*, pp. 14-15.

[2] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Reports*, 1911, pp. 7, 16-17; 1912, pp. 7, 172-3; 1913, pp. 14-15, 18; *S.M.H.*, 17 Feb. 1913; Brisbane *Courier*, 24 Aug., 28 Sept. 1912, 11 June 1913; Ulrich R. Ellis, 'Select References and Basic Facts for the guidance of Students concerning the origin of the Federal Country Party (1902-1923)', Canberra, 1954, pp. 1-2.

[3] W.A. F.S.A. figures from W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1914, p. 47; Q.F.U. figures from *Sunday Times* (Perth), 12 July 1914, p. 38; N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Reports*, 1909, p. 6; 1910, p. 1; 1911, p. 8; 1912, p. 7—revenue figures from financial statements included in the 1912 and 1915 conference reports.

dependencies of the Liberal machine suddenly developed a political life of their own.

This revival of enthusiasm for the country party idea was undoubtedly related to discontent amongst the wheatfarmers, whose industry had entered a difficult period. Expansion had been achieved at the expense of stability; between 1903 and 1910 the area under wheat in Australia had risen from 5,566,000 to 7,372,000 acres under the impulse of steadily rising international prices, and farmers had borrowed heavily from private and public sources to make the best of their opportunity. But just when they were depending on high returns and good harvests to pay off their debts, prices began to waver and fall and, in the 1911-12 season, a drought cut total wheat production from 95 to 72 million bushels. Hardship was general throughout the agricultural regions, but it was probably worst in Western Australia, where the wheat belt had not long been established and where development was faltering.[4] Conservative farmers responded to the setback by reviving their demand for free trade or, at least, for a substantial reduction in the level of protection provided by the Lyne Tariff of 1908. They were disturbed to find that the Federal Liberal Party regarded itself bound not to alter existing tariffs, and that Joseph Cook's brief ministry of 1913-14 did nothing about the Lyne settlement. Settlers in the new wheat lands, still influenced by protectionist sentiment, restricted themselves to calling for reductions in the duties on imported agricultural machinery, corn sacks, fencing wire and fertilizers and at the most were prepared to advocate a revenue tariff, that is the imposition of sufficient duties to provide the Commonwealth government with an adequate public revenue. They were much more concerned to obtain better rural credit facilities and such marketing reforms as the bulk-handling system of transporting wheat, which they noted was opposed by the grain traders and the Chambers of Commerce[5] and ignored by the Liberal leadership.

For many farmers, whether radical or conservative, a country party offered a political solution. For the agrarian conservatives, there was a case for a farmers' party which, while being anti-Labor, could nevertheless impress upon the Liberals the need for free trade and rural development. A. J. Monger, president of the Western Australian F.S.A., put this point of view strongly in a letter to Sir John Forrest in February 1914, when he wrote:

> the fundamental difference between the primary producer and the Liberal Party in the matter of a protective tariff renders support of

[4] T. Langford-Smith, 'Water Supply in the Agricultural Areas of Western Australia', pp. 138-42; G. Taylor, *The Agricultural Bank and Industries Assistance Board* (Melbourne, 1921), pp. 26-40; 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Mallee Belt and Esperance Lands', Pap. 5, *W.A.P.P.*, 1917, vol. I.

[5] See 'Final Report from the Royal Commission on the Marketing, Transportation, and Storage of Grain', Pap. 37, pp. 3-5, *V.P.P.*, 1913-14, vol. II.

> the Liberal Party quite out of the question. The principle of free trade, or, at least of a wholesale reduction of Customs duties on the necessaries of life, and upon our implements and machinery, is so essentially a part of our platform that to support a party pledged to high protection is an impossibility. As the Labor Party are avowedly supporters of a high protective tariff, and are, generally speaking, legislating directly in opposition to the best interests of the country, it is obviously impossible for us to support them. So we are compelled to adopt the course we have taken in creating a new party.[6]

In general, the conservative rural interests, including the pastoralists, appear to have been shaken by the extent to which the united Liberal Parties, which they had at first welcomed as a means of defeating the Labor Party, had closed them out from important areas of influence. From one point of view, the desire to form country parties represented a revolt against a hardening two-party system, in which the old distinctions between rural and city interests, between protectionists and free traders, between liberals and conservatives, were rapidly losing their importance. Then there was the fear that the Liberal Party had become too much subject to the influence of radical Deakinites on the one hand and urban manufacturing and commercial interests on the other. The call for a country party portrayed nostalgia for a vanished order. 'There was a time', noted the *Pastoralists' Review* in August 1912,

> when a 'country party' was a factor to be reckoned with in most Australian Legislatures, but the country member has been absorbed by the party system until it is no longer possible to hear a pronounced rural voice, or have a defined country vote influencing legislation. As for the Federal Parliament, there seems to be no such thing as a distinctive country interest, and the consequence is that, whilst one party is out for preference to unionists, . . . the other party is inclined to consider the city manufacturer and merchant before the producer. . . . The question is, cannot something be done to resurrect the old country parties in order that they may at least make their influence felt in Parliament, even if they cannot hold the balance of power or capture the administration?[7]

Pastoralists and established farmers were anxious to persuade the Liberal leadership to accept the need for a Country Party,[8] something which the Liberals were not prepared to do. Instead of accommodating or encouraging the country party movement, they tried to block it at every opportunity, and made strenuous efforts to prevent it from establishing electoral territory of its own. At first they succeeded, but

[6] 'Copy of Correspondence between Sir John Forrest and Mr. A. J. Monger', Perth, 1914, Monger to Forrest, 17 Feb. 1914, p.[2]. See also statement by C. J. Moran, W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, August 1913, p. 32.

[7] The *Pastoralists' Review*, XXII, 6, 15 Aug. 1912, p. 569.

[8] See for example the *Pastoral Review* (formerly the *Pastoralists' Review*), XXIV, 6, 16 June 1914, p. 545.

by 1914 they were slowly giving ground and had even lost a decisive battle in Western Australia. The conflict between political farmers and the Liberal establishment in the major States now became the main focus of interest.

In New South Wales, the leadership which had committed the F.S.A. to the freehold principle and to an electoral alliance with the Liberal Party faced no serious challenge to its authority until 1912. Robert Patten, the Association's President from 1909 to 1914, set himself firmly against the suggestion that the F.S.A. should form its own party and insisted that it should never forget its differences with the Labor Party.

> Whilst we have striven successfully to render assistance in restoring responsible government, as we understand it—that is, the two party system—it does seem extraordinary that we are being advised to right about face and practically introduce the three party system.[9]

This was also the view of the Association's secretary, T. I. Campbell,[10] and of A. E. Hunt, a prominent member of the executive. At first these men had no difficulty in defending the Liberal connection, especially when in 1911 the Minister of Lands in the State Labor government revived the freehold-leasehold controversy by pressing for the repeal of the 1908 Conversion Act.[11] In the end the government changed its policy, the minister resigning from the cabinet, and in 1912 contented itself with passing the Crown Lands Amendment Act, which created a new leasehold tenure (the Homestead Farm) but did nothing to prevent the continued alienation of Homestead Selection leases. Throughout this affair, the F.S.A. gave its unqualified support to the Liberal opposition.[12] Nevertheless, the wisdom of the established strategy was being questioned by Arthur Trethowan, a Riverina wheat farmer and vice-president of the Association, who argued that the Liberals' past record showed that they needed a parliamentary country party to ensure their respect for rural interests. A Liberal administration, he pointed out, had been tainted by the 1904-5 land scandals, and a succession of Liberal governments had failed to reduce the concentration of trade and industry in and around Sydney; there had been no attempt, for example, to construct cross-country railways which would have built up ports other than Sydney. Trethowan wanted a country party to support the Liberals in Parliament—indeed, he argued that only a country party could recover those rural seats gained by Labor

[9] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1910, p. 9. See also statement by S. L. Gardiner, ibid., 1911, p. 50.

[10] See *Farmer and Settler* (Sydney), 18 Mar. 1910.

[11] Evatt, *Australian Labour Leader*, pp. 207-20. For a review of Labor's land policy see Robin Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics, A Study of Eastern Australia, 1850-1910*, pp. 206-8.

[12] Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, pp. 28-31.

in recent elections—but he insisted that it should be a separate and independent group.[13]

Even the *Pastoralists' Review*, although strongly anti-Labor in outlook, admitted the force of this argument:

> That the inland settlers have great reason for dissatisfaction must be fully conceeded [*sic*]. But if one political party will not give heed to the demand for decentralisation, it will not be astonishing if support is given to the opposite party, of whatever character it may be, should it promise to effect the necessary reform, even if on other grounds such support would be withheld. In short, the discontent of the settlers, especially the agricultural settlers, is telling in favour of the Labour party, distasteful as such an outcome may be.[14]

Such journals were not suggesting that the coalition of interests behind the Liberal Parties should be broken up, but rather that the extent of the differences in that coalition should be recognized and allowance made for them. Given their lack of confidence in a Liberal leadership which was also a city leadership, farmers would be much more at ease with a party of their own, even if its independence were reduced to a minimum.

Inconclusive discussions about the possibility of forming a country party had been held at the 1910 and 1911 conferences of the F.S.A. but the issues were posed clearly for the first time at the 1912 conference, where a fierce debate ended in the defeat of a motion for 'a straight-out Country Party' by 128 votes to 93.[15] The executive, which had opposed the country party idea, had good reason to be alarmed at the amount of support commanded by its opponents especially when, in 1913, two other third-party movements began to attract support in the countryside. Various F.S.A. men were associated both with a Country Party Association (C.P.A.), set up by a number of dissident Liberals,[16] and with an attempt by George S. Beeby, a former Labor minister, to found a centre party.[17] There was now a clear possibility that some country party candidates would contest the next State election campaign, despite the operation of the second-ballot system introduced in 1910, and spoil the Liberal Party's chances of ousting Labor from the crucial electorates of the Tablelands and the Central West. One way of retrieving the situation would be for the F.S.A. to declare for a country party, with the object of bringing third party feeling under control, and to fight the election in alliance with the Liberal organization. This is in fact what happened.

[13] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1912, p. 85. See also ibid., 1911, p. 53.

[14] The *Pastoralists' Review*, XXI, 9, 15 Nov. 1911, p. 947.

[15] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1912, pp. 82-107.

[16] See *S.M.H.*, 5 July 1913. Forty delegates to the 1913 conference of the F.S.A. also attended a C.P.A. dinner held on 4 July.

[17] E.g. B. J. Grogan, *S.M.H.*, 3 Jan. 1913. See Evatt, pp. 236-7.

In 1913 the F.S.A. executive changed its strategy and decided to recommend that the annual conference of the Association should 'enable the incoming Executive Council to further strengthen and forward the Country Party'.[18] The Conference duly approved the principle of forming a country party by 208 votes to 96, eleven out of the thirteen members of the executive voting in the majority.[19] As a result, the Association nominated 26 candidates[20] for the State election of 6 December 1913, but the fact that all but one of them had also been endorsed by the Liberal Association indicated that the executive had interpreted its mandate in the narrowest sense. Campbell acknowledged this when he stated early in the campaign:

> the organising forces of our association and that of the Liberal Association have been consolidated. All the candidates . . . have accepted the Farmers and Settlers' platform, which in all its principles is identical with the Liberal Party's platform.[21]

The Labor Party, however, had no trouble in winning the election. Both the third-party movements failed to make an impression; the C.P.A. returned only one member (G. S. Briner, for Raleigh) and Beeby's National Progressive Party was unsuccessful in all the ten seats it contested. Eleven members were returned to the Assembly with the endorsement of both the F.S.A. and the Liberal Party, and in April 1914 they were invited by the F.S.A. executive to call themselves a separate party. They made a tentative move to do so but were persuaded by the Liberal leader, C. G. Wade, to identify themselves fully with the Liberal Opposition. Early in May they attended a Liberal meeting and, according to Wade: 'emphasised that they would continue to use the Opposition party room, and that they accepted myself as leader unreservedly, and they repudiated any suggestion of forming an independent third party'.[22] At the F.S.A. conference of July 1914, several delegates complained about the collapse of the venture and

[18] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1913, p. 17.

[19] Ibid., pp. 35-58.

[20] The electorates contested by the F.S.A. were as follows:

Albury	Durham	Murrumbidgee
Armidale	Gloucester	Macquarie
Ashburnham	Gough	Namoi
Burrangong	Gwydir	Orange
Bathurst	Lachlan	Tamworth
Bingara	Lyndhurst	Upper Hunter
Corowa	Liverpool Plains	Wagga
Castlereagh	Lismore	Yass
Cootamundra	Murray	

(*S.M.H.*, 23 Oct. 1913; 18 Nov. 1913; 24 Apr. 1914; *Land* (Sydney), 21 Feb. 1913.)

[21] *S.M.H.*, 23 Oct. 1913.

[22] *S.M.H.*, 2 May 1914.

reaffirmed the Association's determination to form a separate party by 311 votes to 45.[23]

In Victoria, also, the Liberals were trying to prevent the country party movement from destroying non-Labor unity. However, since the Liberal Party was so powerful in this State (it was returned to office in the 1911 election with 43 seats in a 65-member Assembly), the temptation to form groups within the government's following was considerable. In July 1912, shortly after W. A. Watt had taken over from John Murray as Liberal Premier, a country faction was formed under the leadership of Donald McLean (Daylesford), and by August it had sufficiently impressed an *Argus* reporter with its influence for him to write:

> The great numerical strength and influence of the Country party has undoubtedly placed the Ministry in a remarkable situation. This section of the members comprises the whole of the Ministerial party with the exception of about half-a-dozen metropolitan members, and it is thus in a position to practically enforce its wishes upon the Ministry. It has its various sub-committees, and holds meetings almost daily, quite apart from the Ministry, to decide what course should be taken towards the Ministry's measures. In several instances already this session it has practically secured important concessions which it has considered desirable for the benefits of country interests. . . . The Country party has, perhaps quite unintentionally, become, if not a political party, at least a party of political importance.[24]

For the most part, the new faction concentrated on establishing its consultative status within the Liberal Party but in 1913 McLeod tried to use it in overthrowing the government. The trouble arose over Watt's attempt to carry out a redistribution of electorates which would have altered the ratio of urban to rural constituencies. The electoral weighting in Victoria had always favoured rural seats so that, since 1890 at least, three country voters had been worth four Melbourne voters. However, this weighting had been made much worse when a major revision of the electoral rolls, carried out by the police in 1911, had greatly increased the number of registered voters in the metropolitan area,[25] altering the relative value of country to Melbourne voters from 3:4 to 2:4, as the table on p. 84 shows.

Some readjustment was clearly necessary, and in 1913 Watt announced his intention of bringing in a bill to add four seats to the Melbourne

[23] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1914, pp. 36-56.

[24] *Argus*, 30 Aug. 1912. See also Brisbane *Courier*, 17 June 1913 (statement by W. L. Keast, M.L.A.).

[25] Women were enfranchised under the Adult Suffrage Act (No. 2185, 1908) and improved methods of registration were established by the Electoral Act of 1910 (No. 2288). Both these reforms necessitated a revision of the rolls which was carried out during July 1911. The new rolls came into force on 31 August 1911.

Victoria: Comparison of Average Numbers of Electors in Country and Metropolitan Electorates, 1892–1914

		Average number of electors in:		
	Election Date	*A Metropolitan Seats*	*B Country Seats*	*Country average as percentage of metropolitan average*
	1892	3,940	2,507	63·63
	1894	2,915	2,263	77·63
	1897	3,181	2,442	76·77
	1900	3,605	2,656	73·67
1903	1902	3,693	2,761	74·76
Redistribution	1904	4,955	3,761	75·90
	1907	5,117	3,492	68·24
	1908	5,187	3,522	67·90
	1911	15,680	8,458	53·94
	1914	19,466	9,119	46·85

total. His proposal aroused strong feelings amongst the country members and, in an effort to exploit the situation, on 23 July McLeod moved a motion of want-of-confidence in the government, citing its electoral redistribution scheme as one cause for dissatisfaction. The rest of the country faction refused to back him at this point, however, and he later withdrew his motion.[26] By December he had gathered sufficient support to make a second try and this time the government was defeated by a combination of country and Labor members, the voting being 31 to 29.[27] McLeod had hoped that Watt would reconstruct his ministry but the Premier, in resigning his commission, refused to advise the Lieutenant-Governor about his successor, and G. A. Elmslie was commissioned to form a Labor Ministry. The Liberals promptly closed their ranks, carried a want-of-confidence motion in the new administration and enabled Watt to take office at the head of another ministry which did not, however, include McLeod or any other of the country faction's leaders. But although Watt had checked the ambitions of the McLeod group, perhaps the most powerful in the long line of Victorian 'country parties', he did not again attempt to remedy the imbalance between country and urban electorates, an imbalance which was greatly to exaggerate the strength of the Country Party in the twenties and thirties.

The Liberals were also concerned about the independent leanings of the People's Party, which had been formed in September 1910 to organize rural electorates for the Liberal cause while a People's Liberal Party and the Australian Women's National League looked after urban constituencies.[28] At first the People's Party gave little trouble; with an

[26] *Argus*, 17-30 July 1913; *V.P.D.*, vol. 133, 23 July 1913, pp. 372-90; 24 July 1913, pp. 406-32; 29 July 1913, pp. 449-52.

[27] *V.P.D.*, vol. 135, 4 Dec. 1913, p. 2980.

[28] *Argus*, 2 Sept. 1910.

interlocking system of local branches, district councils, central executive and annual conferences, it played a leading role in endorsing and supporting Liberal candidates during State elections,[29] and helped organize opposition to the 1911 and 1913 referendum proposals. However, some of its conference delegates began complaining about the Liberal connection and opposed moves to have the organizations brought closer together.[30] In the 1914 State election it issued a manifesto 'for the pronouncement of its views as a country party' and advised rural electors to support only those Liberal candidates who supported such policies as decentralization and assistance for primary industries.[31] The signs of rebellion did not go much further than this. In 1915 the party's president felt able to say that 'there was no desire to form a separate country party. They wanted a solid Liberal party.'[32]

In trying to account for the subservience of the People's Party, members of the Victorian Farmers' Union made great play of the fact that its low membership fee (5s. at first, later reduced to 1s.) had made it financially dependent on the Constitutional Union, the Liberal Party's finance committee.[33] They might have added that it was also dominated by a conservative and pro-Liberal oligarchy and that its large nominal membership (it had 500 branches and 50,000 members in 1915)[34] made it a difficult body to control or influence.

The Liberal Party in Western Australia, however, was not able to prevent the F.S.A. from forming a third party. The Association began its career as an obscure employers' union, organized in March 1912 to combat the R.W.U.'s attempt to bring agricultural labourers under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court. Its second conference in June 1912, however, recommended to the executive that the Association should adopt a political platform and elect to Parliament members pledged to support it.[35] The executive members, who conferred in July, found themselves divided on the

[29] Ibid., 28 Oct., 4, 11 Nov. 1911; 12, 30 Apr. 1913; 6, 11 Nov. 1914.

[30] Ibid., 22 July, 8 Sept., 12 Oct. 1911; 26 Sept. 1913; 25 Sept. 1914.

[31] Ibid., 22 Oct. 1914.

[32] Ibid., 11 Feb. 1915.

[33] See articles by 'Observer', *Farmers' Advocate*, 30 May, 6, 20 June 1919, and B. D. Graham, 'The Place of Finance Committees in Non-Labor Politics, 1910-1930', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, VI, 1, May 1960, pp. 41-52.

[34] *Argus*, 10 Feb. 1915.

[35] Mercer, *On Farmers' Service*, pp. 14-21, 39-40. For the general history of Western Australian politics in this period see B. K. Hyams, 'Western Australian Political Parties: 1901-1916', *University Studies in History and Economics*, Perth, Sept. 1955, vol. 11, No. 3; F. K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*. On the early record of the Western Australian Country Party, see J. R. Robertson, 'The First Years of the Western Australian Country Party, 1912-1916', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, XI, 43, Oct. 1964, pp. 343-60.

proposal, some claiming that the F.S.A. would cease attracting Labor supporters if it formed a political party and others arguing that rural interests required separate parliamentary representation;[36] finally in August 1912 they decided to refer the problem to a special conference of branch delegates, which was held in March 1913. This meeting, the first to draw a large number of delegates from the eastern parts of the wheat belt, was militant in tone and decided by 103 to 17 to form a country party in both the State and Federal Parliaments.[37] As James Gardiner, an executive member, wrote afterwards: 'The decision was a branches decision, uninfluenced by the views of their executive.'[38] In August 1913 a further conference restricted full membership of the Association to farmers and graziers and agreed on a constitution which made provision for the pre-selection of country party candidates, the conduct of the Association's election campaign, the observance of a pledge by party members, and executive supervision of the parliamentary party.[39]

Several reasons may be advanced to explain why the Western Australian farmers were so determined to form a country party. As suggested previously, the effect of the 1911 drought and the fall in produce prices may have had a more serious effect in Western Australia than in the eastern States. Farmers in the worst affected areas appear to have blamed the previous Liberal government, which had been defeated in the 1911 election, for their predicament, complaining that it had increased the pace of settlement in marginal lands without adequate preparation. A Nungarin settler wrote in December 1913:

> As harvesting operations draw to a close we have our ideals shattered once more, and are faced with the stern realities of scanty returns and overdue bills. To say that the season has been disappointing is to put it very mildly, and we are all awaking gradually to the fact that it was a colossal blunder of a previous Minister for Lands to force settlement in these areas of light and erratic rainfall. . . . Even the crops in fallow will not average much over 12 bushels, and this in a season of normal rainfall. So what have we to hope for as, with the passing of another year, we have to face the repayment of capital as well as interest to the Agricultural Bank, and we shall, in addition, have to face a solid water rate on account of the reticulation of the scheme water, whether we use it or not.[40]

Added to such resentments were the objections of free traders and revenue tariffists to the apparently protectionist federal Liberal Party,

[36] 'Farmers' and Settlers' Association of Western Australia, Report of Meeting of Executive Committee, held at Technical School, Wednesday, 3/7/12'. (Typescript MS., Farmers' Union Office, Perth.)

[37] W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, March 1913, p. 17.

[38] *West Australian* (Perth), 27 Feb. 1914.

[39] W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, August 1913, pp. 29-34.

[40] Letter dated 27 Dec. 1913, *West Australian*, 8 Jan. 1914.

and a motion in favour of a revenue tariff was adopted at the conference of August 1913.[41]

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the Western Australian F.S.A. was its readiness to borrow organizational techniques. Contact with the New South Wales F.S.A. was particularly close; two members of the executive had attended a meeting of the New South Wales Association's executive late in 1912, and watched preparations for the 1913 State election campaign.[42] When Robert Patten, the latter's president, visited Perth in March 1914, he described his executive's plans for forming a country party in the State's Legislative Assembly.[43] But the Western Australians, much more than the farmers of New South Wales, were willing to learn from the Labor Party also,[44] and when they talked of their country party holding the balance of power in the Assembly and bargaining support for concessions,[45] the reference was clearly to past Labor strategy. During the 1901-4 State Parliament, for example, the six-member Labor group had attracted great attention by exacting good terms for its support of the James Ministry.

The speed with which the Western Australian F.S.A. had changed from an employers' union to a militant third-party organization was not at all to the liking of the Liberal leaders, who had certainly not anticipated such a transformation. Sir John Forrest, the federal member for Swan and one of the Liberal League's founders, recalled that when the F.S.A. was formed 'he rejoiced at the event, thinking it would be of great use to the Producers, add to the strength of Liberalism, and prove advantageous in every way'.[46] The first meeting of the Association was held in the Perth clubrooms of the Liberal League,[47] of which several of the F.S.A.'s early leaders, including A. J. Monger, T. H. Wilding, J. D. Hammond and R. M. Leake, had been active members. They and others of the F.S.A. executive were drawn from the established western farming districts such as Northam, York and

[41] W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, August 1913, pp. 32 and 55-9.

[42] W.A. F.S.A. Executive Minutes, 6 Nov. 1912, pp. 10-11.

[43] 'Farmers' and Settlers' Gazette', *Sunday Times*, 22 Mar. 1914. The 'Gazette' was prepared by the F.S.A. and published by arrangement with the *Sunday Times* each week between January 1914 and March 1916.

[44] The fact that the F.S.A.'s original constitution was modelled on that of the Labor Party was freely admitted; see W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1914, p. 25 (H. E. Stanistreet); *W.A.P.D.*, vol. 64, 18 Aug. 1921, p. 308; vol. 66, 16 Aug. 1922, p 249; Hyams, op. cit., pp. 58-9.

[45] E.g. Baxter, W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, August 1913, p. 8, and C. G. Latham, ibid., 1915, p. 25.

[46] Broadsheet amongst Forrest Papers, J. S. Battye Library of Western Australian History, Archives Section: 'Federal and State Politics, Speech by Sir John Forrest at Bridgetown, March 15th, 1916. Appeal for United Liberalism'.

[47] According to H. W. Vincent, vice-president of the Liberal League (*West Australian*, 14 July 1914; Mercer, op. cit., p. 17).

Kellerberrin; their families were amongst the oldest in the State and they epitomized the conservative values of the stable society which had flourished before the gold rushes and the expansion of the wheat belt.

From the outset, these men treated the F.S.A. as their enterprise (they guaranteed the original £800 overdraft which the Westralian Bank made to set the organization on its feet)[48] and the minutes of the first executive meetings leave one with the strong impression that they saw the Association as primarily a means of alienating small-farmer support from the Labor party. Where there was disagreement, it was about whether their object could be better served by forming a third party or by keeping the F.S.A. out of politics altogether. D. Munro, also an ex-Liberal, had warned in July 1912:

> we are in this awkward position. We have in the old established districts very strict liberals and we have in the newer districts very strict labour people. Those people require taking by the hand, and no doubt, ere long, they would soon learn from experience which Party would be the most profitable to them if they stay on the land long enough. However, the result is that we wish to claim these people, and the only way in which we can claim them and induce them to come into our Association is by remaining non-political.[49]

It is not certain whether this conservative *élite* could have prevented the small farmers from taking matters into their own hands at the two conferences of 1913, but the question was never put to the test as they chose to swim with the current. All but two of the seventeen-member executive voted at the March conference for the motion to form a country party and Alex Monger, the president, identified himself wholeheartedly with the venture. He was one of the outstanding figures of the early country party movement; a tall, rather remote man, he lectured the delegates as if they were schoolboys, but he had their trust. The small farmers too, while they complained about the preponderance of 'St George's Terrace Farmers' on the executive, accepted Monger.[50] Unlike many conservative farm leaders, he did not try to frustrate the country party movement; in fact, once he had seen the strength behind it he did everything in his power to encourage it, and the Liberals found his dedication to the idea one of their biggest problems.

In July 1913, W. H. Clarke-James, the Liberal League secretary, wrote to H. E. Stanistreet, the secretary of the F.S.A., asking whether representatives of the two groups could confer 'concerning the political situation and spheres of work'. Stanistreet, undoubtedly acting on Monger's instructions, fobbed him off until after the August conference,

[48] Mercer, op. cit., p. 21.

[49] W.A. F.S.A. Executive Minutes, 3 July 1912, p. 27.

[50] See W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, August 1913, p. 24; 1915, pp. 15-16; Hyams, op. cit., p. 58.

and then, on 22 August, informed him that the F.S.A. executive wished to emphasize that the country party would remain 'entirely distinct from and not allied with any other Party'.[51] There the matter rested until February 1914 when Frank Wilson, the Liberal leader, attacked James Gardiner, another F.S.A. leader known to favour an independent country party, and offered a working alliance on the grounds that farmers should co-operate with 'the manufacturing and commercial community' against Labor.[52]

Forrest, writing from the Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne, now threw his weight into the argument. In February 1914 he wrote to T. H. Wilding complaining that the F.S.A.'s defection from the Liberal forces had increased Labor's chances of taking power, and asked him to show the letter to his colleagues.[53] Monger took the responsibility of replying to Forrest, and until April a lengthy correspondence passed between them. Forrest was willing to see the F.S.A. exist as a separate body within the structure of the Liberal League, but he stressed that unless non-Labor interests stuck together, Labor would gain at their expense. He would not admit the necessity of a farmers' party in Parliament, maintaining that he, Harry Gregory (Dampier), and J. M. Fowler (Perth) had always served the rural interests of Western Australia in the Commonwealth Parliament. Monger's case rested primarily on his assertion that a country party was necessary to press for a revenue rather than a protectionist tariff, for increased decentralization and for a more considered land settlement policy, matters which the Liberals, dominated by commercial and manufacturing interests, had neglected. He pointed out that the F.S.A., although opposed to Labor, had attracted many members who would otherwise have supported the Labor Party, and that while he did not favour nominating country party candidates for federal elections, where simple-majority voting still applied, no problem was raised by their contesting State elections which had been conducted under preferential voting since 1911.

> You seem to forget that we have on the land today thousands of men and women who have hitherto voted Labor. We have already alienated many of these from the Labor ranks, and whereas they will, I think, truly record their votes in favour of the Country Party, they would, I am sure, vote solidly for Labor if it were a direct contest between Labor and Liberal. We hope in time to alienate all Labor supporters on the land, but this can only be done through some

[51] The whole of this correspondence was given to the press by the vice-president of the Liberal League, see *West Australian*, 14 July 1914.

[52] Ibid., 25 Feb. 1914.

[53] These letters were published in the *West Australian*, 24 Feb., 6 May 1914, and in a pamphlet, 'Copy of Correspondence between Sir John Forrest and Mr. A. J. Monger, (President of the Farmers' and Settlers' Association)', Perth, [1914]. For background information, see U. R. Ellis in the *Countryman* (N.S.W.), Jan. 1954, p. 5; Feb. 1954, p. 4.

outside party. I would welcome a means to overcome the present trouble, but so far I have failed to discover one. Any pressure towards consolidation of our forces at present would, I fear, wreck the association, and leave matters infinitely worse than they are today. What I think may be accomplished later on is, I am greatly afraid, impossible of immediate realisation.[54]

There the matter rested. In May 1914 the F.S.A. won two seats in the Legislative Council elections,[55] and in the Assembly elections of 21 October 1914 it nominated candidates for all seats in the wheat belt, where most of its 180 branches were concentrated in a broad band running from Wyalkatchem in the north to Katanning in the south-east.[56] It also contested the dairying electorates of Albany, Nelson and Sussex in the south and Northam and Swan in the established farming area close to Perth. In Toodyay, A. E. Piesse, who had switched his allegiance from the Liberal to the Country Party just prior to the election, was re-elected unopposed, while in Nelson the Country Party candidate defeated a Labor man in a straight fight. Apart from this, Country Party candidates opposed ten sitting Liberals and defeated five of them in the wheat-belt seats of Greenough, Irwin, York, Beverley and Pingelly. Four Labor seats were contested by the Country Party with one success, Avon. As a result of the poll, the Scaddan Labor Government was returned with 26 members in a House of 50, where it was opposed by the Liberal Opposition (16 members) and supported from the corner benches by the eight-member Country Party. The first break-through had been made.

The second came a year later in Queensland. The Q.F.U. had returned two members to the State Assembly in the election of 27 April 1912[57] but made no effort to break away from the Liberal fold, its president stating that 'they had absolutely no idea of forming a third party'.[58] Here, too, however, rank and file pressure for independent action had its effect and by 1913 the Union was trying, without success, to persuade the Farmers' Parliamentary Union to forsake its rôle as a faction in the Liberal Party and become a country party.[59] By 1914, under growing branch pressure, the Q.F.U. executive decided not to co-operate with the Liberals in selecting candidates for the election of

[54] *Sunday Times*, 10 May 1914, p. 39. This letter (Monger to Forrest 5 Apr. 1914) was not included in the pamphlet referred to above.

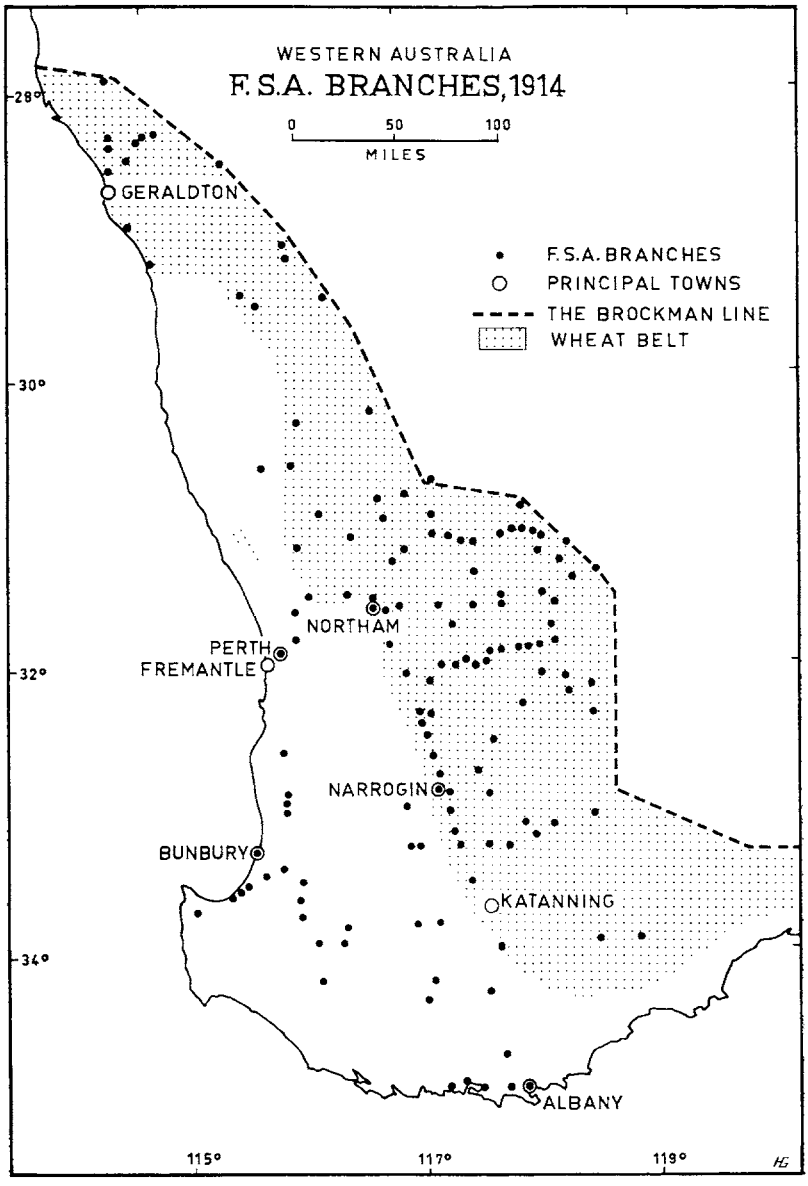
[55] C. F. Baxter (Eastern Province) and H. Carson (Central Province).

[56] See map 1.

[57] W. J. Luke (Aubigny) and W. J. Bebbington (Drayton), Brisbane *Courier*, 16, 28 Mar. 1912. On the formation and subsequent history of the Q.F.U. see Z. Abidin, 'The Origins and Development of the Queensland Country Party, 1909-1932', M.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1958, pp. 1-53.

[58] Brisbane *Courier*, 18 Mar. 1912.

[59] See ibid., 18, 19 June, 3, 12 Sept., 2 Dec. 1913; *S.M.H.*, 25 Apr. 1914.



1 F.S.A. Branches, Western Australia, 1914

May 1915, but to nominate its own.[60] The Union returned five members, all from the south-east,[61] but as the Queensland Labor Party won 45 of the 72 seats in the Assembly, the Country Party found itself a small group in an anxious anti-Labor opposition.

At the federal level, the evenness of the electoral struggle did not leave much room for independent action, and most farmers' and graziers' organizations admitted that the defeat of the Labor Party should be their first objective. According to the *Pastoral Review*:

> The producers must either control directly every Parliament, or must hold the balance of power so that they can guarantee their own interests; this is their sole hope. Their interests are really everyone's interests. You can destroy your cities, but so long as the country flourishes these cities will rise up finer than ever, but if the country production is dead, and dead it must be under socialism, grass will grow in every street in the cities and ruin must reign. Therefore in this 1914 it is to be hoped that every man, whether he owns one acre or a million acres, one sheep or a million, will sink all differences, the rich man help the poorer, combine together and get the best representation possible in every Parliament in the Commonwealth. The socialists have the gloves off and are fighting. The farmers have so far only been playing at war.[62]

The federal elections of 31 May 1913 and 5 September 1914 were both fought bitterly. On the first occasion the Fisher Labor government was defeated and the Liberal Party, with a majority of one seat, took office under Sir Joseph Cook, but Labor won the snap election of 1914 by 42 seats out of 75.

In neither campaign did the farmers' organizations act boldly. In 1913, the Q.F.U. helped to select the Liberal candidates for Wide Bay and Lilley,[63] and in New South Wales the F.S.A. endorsed the Liberal League's Senate team and nine of its candidates for the House of Representatives.[64] Eight of the latter were elected[65] but they did not try to form a country faction within the parliamentary Liberal Party. In 1914 the F.S.A. again played a supporting role in the New South Wales campaign, but the farmers' organizations in Queensland and Western Australia showed signs of independence. Thus although the Q.F.U. District Councils in the Moreton constituency supported the

[60] See the *Dairyman, Farmer and Grazier* (Toowoomba), 10 May 1914, pp. 6, 17, 22; *Sunday Times*, 12 July 1914.

[61] J. G. Appel (Albert), A. E. Moore (Aubigny), W. J. Bebbington (Drayton), H. S. Hodges (Nanango) and P. M. Bayley (Pittsworth).

[62] The *Pastoral Review*, XXIV, 1, 15 Jan. 1914, p. 41.

[63] Brisbane *Courier*, 1, 3 Feb. 1913.

[64] *S.M.H.*, 20, 27 Feb., 31 Mar., 3, 14, 22 Apr. 1913; *Land*, 28 Mar. 1913.

[65] H. R. M. Piggott (Calare), J. Thomson (Cowper), A. Chapman (Eden-Monaro), H. Patten (Hume), P. P. Abbott (New England), F. B. S. Falkiner (Riverina), W. M. Fleming (Robertson) and A. H. B. Conroy (Werriwa).

sitting Liberal member,[66] those in Wide Bay ran J. A. Austin as a straight-out farmers' candidate against the Labor leader, Andrew Fisher. Austin's candidature was later withdrawn to enable Fisher to assist the Liberal government with difficulties arising from the declaration of war in Europe, but his name remained on the ballot paper and attracted 36 per cent of the votes.[67] In Western Australia the F.S.A. took an independent line; although it agreed not to oppose Sir John Forrest in Swan,[68] where most of its branches were located, it considered endorsing Harry Gregory, the sitting Liberal member for Dampier, as its own nominee. Gregory created difficulties when he insisted on asking the Liberal League's approval, and a special conference of the Association, held in July, decided not to endorse him. However, the conference recommended that the F.S.A. should put forward its own Senate team rather than present a joint ticket with the Liberals. When it was unable to muster enough candidates to do so, two of its prospects, J. Thomson and V. H. P. Spencer, were included in the Liberal team, which was nevertheless defeated.[69]

The importance of the simple-majority voting system in inhibiting the farmers' organizations from nominating their own candidates in these elections cannot be overestimated. The fear of splitting the narrow majorities by which many sitting Liberals were being returned was always present, especially since the major parties were so evenly balanced in the House of Representatives. 'The forces of anti-Socialism', the New South Wales F.S.A. executive pointed out in its annual report for 1913, 'must combine and work in unison if we are to succeed under the Federal electoral law'.[70] In Western Australia, likewise, Monger told the 1914 conference of the Western Australian F.S.A. that the main concern was still to keep Labor out of office and that he would not like to see Dampier 'pass to the Socialists by reason of a triangular contest. . . . Until the present Federal Electoral Act is amended, we, as a party, are not likely . . . to get our proper proportion of representation.'[71] On the other hand, the Liberals were also realizing the necessity of introducing alternative voting systems to relieve the increasing burden of maintaining non-Labor unity despite divergent pressures from sectional interests, and Sir Joseph Cook promised the electors during the 1914 campaign that if his ministry were returned to office it would introduce preferential voting for elections to the House of

[66] Brisbane *Courier*, 9, 20, 21, 25 July 1914; *West Australian*, 15 July 1914.

[67] Brisbane *Courier*, 16, 29 June, 8, 15, 25 July, 11, 18, 25 Aug., 1 Sept. 1914.

[68] W.A. F.S.A. Executive Minutes, 1912-16, 11 June 1914, p. 77.

[69] Ibid., 7 May 1914, p. 74; 11 June 1914, pp. 76-7; 7 July 1914, p. 80; 24 July 1914, p. 84; W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1914, pp. 6, 8, 47-52; *West Australian*, 9, 10, 14, 17, 18 July, 3 Sept. 1914.

[70] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1913, p. 18.

[71] W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1914, p. 49.

Representatives.[72] The Liberals were also persuaded that proportional representation should be substituted for the simple-majority system of block voting then used in Senate elections, mainly because the latter method had enabled Labor to win all 18 Senate places in the 1910 election with only 50·30 per cent of the votes.[73]

While the emergence of the Australian Country Parties was undoubtedly aided by the marketing and price controls used during World War I,[74] their appearance on the political stage makes sense only if it is seen as the product of factors which were operating well before 1914. At one level, the country party movement can be explained as an outcome of three broad factors—the feeling of political separatism which the insecurity of their industry gave the wheat farmers, especially those in the newly developed regions; the strength of the agrarian tradition in rural Australia; and the progressive development of organizational and political techniques by farm groups from about 1870 onwards. At another level, the movement within each State was advanced or retarded by local factors. It was strongest in New South Wales, but here the conservative *élite* dominating the F.S.A. was able to hold it in check and the freehold-leasehold controversy created divisions amongst farmers; in Victoria both the parliamentary country factions and such electoral organizations as the Farmers' League and the People's Party gave the illusion of separate action while distracting farmers' attention from the real problems involved in forming their own party; but in Western Australia, a combination of a new, dynamic organization, the exceptional discontent of the wheat-belt farmers, and the operation of preferential voting in State elections resulted in the formation of Australia's first country party. Had the war not intervened it is quite probable that country parties would eventually have been formed in New South Wales and Victoria and that, once preferential voting had been introduced in federal elections, one would have been established in the House of Representatives as well. It is important to make this point, for while it is true to say that the politics of the war period transmuted the country party movement and altered its direction, it would nevertheless be wrong to regard the Country Parties as products of this narrow context alone. Their basis had been laid well before 1914.

On the other hand, the districts interested in the country party idea were dispersed and isolated from each other, and it was already clear that its electoral impact would be small compared with that made by the Populists in the American elections of the nineties. The geographical regions identified with small-farming were not coherent and

[72] *S.M.H.*, 16 July 1914.

[73] 'The Liberal Speakers' Handbook for the Federal Campaign, 1914', Melbourne, 1914, p. 26 Political Science Pamphlets, State Library of Victoria).

[74] E.g. L. F. Crisp, *The Parliamentary Government of the Commonwealth of Australia*, pp. 127-8.

concentrated, as they were in Canada and the United States, but were narrow and attenuated, particularly in easten Australia. Furthermore, the country party movement had failed to win a following in South Australia, whose wheatlands were generally well-established and farmers confident, and in Queensland, where its influence was restricted to the Darling Downs, although even there the advance of the Labor Party was frightening conservative settlers into abandoning their experiments in political separatism. Nothing seemed to be stirring in Tasmania, whose Farmers, Stockowners, and Orchardists' Association had shown no desire to form a party of its own. Taking an overall view, an interested observer of the Australia of 1914 could have discerned the first outlines of the party, standing out clearly in Western Australia and New South Wales, faintly visible in Victoria, but indistinct in the other States. The signs indicated a small party with limited and scattered electoral resources.

4

Wartime Politics and the Country Parties 1914-1919

Many factors influenced the growth of the country party movement during the complicated politics of the war years. This period was one of sudden changes of direction, muddled strategies, and confused aims. In 1915 and 1916 the F.S.As. of New South Wales and Western Australia were pursuing independent policies but in 1917 both identified themselves with the new, patriotic National Parties; from then onwards the problem was one of extricating the farm groups from the National Party's establishment and giving them a separate status. The Victorian Farmers' Union, founded in 1916, did not become embroiled in the National movement and was consequently able to provide much of the electoral leadership in the years 1918 and 1919.

In each State, however, the interest of the wheat farmers in the wartime marketing schemes forms a continuous political theme. When the wheat pools were first established in 1915, the farmers were confronted with a completely new apparatus of regulation and price control and they organized themselves to meet a challenge which for them was as much political as administrative. From 1915 onwards they set themselves to reform the pools' administration; later many demanded that growers' representatives be admitted to their boards of management; and later still they requested that the pools should be continued after the war as permanent marketing agencies. In their efforts to reach the centres of power in this new marketing structure, the farmers asked their pressure groups to undertake a wider range of tasks and, above all, to work more seriously towards the objective of creating independent country parties in Parliament.

The Challenge of the Produce Pools

This was certainly a different world from that which had existed before the war. The Commissioners who had inquired into the affairs of the Victorian wheat trade in 1913-14 had again and again been struck by the reluctance of witnesses to believe that the State could be persuaded, either by farmers or any other group, to establish a public agency for handling the wheat export business. One of the Commissioners, Thomas Langdon, had tried in vain to make his respondents express radical opinions, only to produce exchanges like this:

> [Langdon] Will you admit that the farmers of this country could compel the Government to carry out their wishes?—
>
> [John C. Smith] The farmers have had very little influence with the Government during the last 40 years, and, judging from past experience, I would not say the farmers could compel the Government to do anything. I have been trying to get a combination among the farmers all my life; but I am just about where I started.[1]

The wartime marketing schemes changed all that. For the first time since economic restrictions had been imposed on the early colonies, Australian farmers and graziers learnt what it was like to have the state regulate the sale of their produce and fix buying prices; some resented what they regarded as an unwarranted interference with the laws of supply and demand and grumbled about mismanagement, others inquired whether the schemes might not be worth continuing —but none remained indifferent. No previous issue had aroused so many of the rural sections at the same time, and in every region rural pressure groups found their numbers swelling and the demand for action growing. Established bodies gained new life and new organizations were formed. The focus of rural politics was no longer the tariff, or the land laws, or the relationship of rural labourers to the arbitration system, but the new marketing schemes, whose makeshift bureaucracies, created within the space of months, were affecting rural life directly and continuously.

The wheat pool came into operation first.[2] After the outbreak of war in 1914, the Commonwealth government prohibited the export of wheat, and the State governments followed this up by providing for the purchase of the 1914-15 crop. By the spring of 1915, however, it had become clear that existing arrangements would not be adequate to deal with the 1915-16 harvest; for one thing, it threatened to be a large one (it actually totalled 179 million bushels as compared with the previous season's crop of 25 million bushels), and for another, shipping space was so difficult to find that the need for a central chartering authority was obvious. A conference held in Melbourne towards the end of 1915 laid the foundations of a more comprehensive scheme, which was subsequently extended to cover all the harvests until that of 1920-1. The pool, administered by an Australian Wheat Board which consisted of the Prime Minister and a Minister from each of the wheat States (Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and

[1] 'Progress Report of the Royal Commission on Marketing', Pap. 21, Minutes of Evidence, p. 218, Q. 5576. See also the evidence of John McClure, ibid., pp. 125-6, Qs. 2981-83, *V.P.P.*, 1913-14, vol. II.

[2] The best account of the organization and working of the pool is contained in 'The Australian Wheat Pooling Scheme, A Brief Review; issued by the Australian Wheat Board', Melbourne, 1918 (Copy in J. S. Battye Library of Western Australia). See also F. R. Beasley, *Open Market Versus Pooling in Australia*, pp. 34-40; W. Millar Smith, *The Marketing of Australian and New Zealand Primary Products*, pp. 9-14.

Western Australia), was entrusted with the task of fixing the purchase price, allotting shipping to each port, and realizing the crop. It was assisted by various State authorities, such as the New South Wales Wheat Board and the Victorian Wheat Commission, and was counselled by an Advisory Board consisting of representatives of Darling and Co., Bell and Co., Dalgety and Co., and Louis Dreyfus and Co. These pre-war trading firms, whose co-operation was required to make the scheme a success, were appointed as receiving agents and, according to several accounts, were assured that the open market would be restored once the war was over.[3] Sales abroad were arranged by the London Wheat Committee, consisting of the High Commissioner and the Agents General of the wheat States. The financial arrangements provided for the associated banks to make advances to growers on delivery of wheat to an agent of the pool, the advances being guaranteed by the Commonwealth and wheat-State governments. In practice, the agent gave the grower a negotiable certificate, which could be realized at a specified bank. Between the 1915-16 and 1920-1 seasons, the Australian Wheat Board handled 637,408,000 bushels, of which 456,262,000 were exported for a realization of £140,661,563.[4]

Other pools were no less important. In November 1916, when the British government agreed to buy the entire Australian and New Zealand clips for 1916-17 at a guaranteed price, the Commonwealth established a Central Wool Committee (C.W.C.) to handle Australian arrangements. Headed by Sir John M. Higgins, a retired metallurgist who was knighted in 1918, the C.W.C. consisted of nine members representing growers, brokers, buyers and manufacturers, and was assisted by committees in each State. The original purchase agreement was subsequently extended to cover the 1917-18, 1918-19 and 1919-20 seasons, and in the four years of the scheme's operations, 7 million bales of wool, valued at £173 million, were handled. Unlike the wheat scheme, the wool pool's financial arrangements presented no difficulties; within fourteen days of his lot's appraisement, that is, well before the wool's realization, the grower had been paid 90 per cent of the price from funds provided by the British government.[5] Meat Boards were in operation from 1915 to 1920; the sale and distribution of sugar was controlled by the Commonwealth government from 1915; the price-fixing of dairy products had been enforced from 1915, and winter butter pools were in operation from 1917 until 1920.

In general, farmers and graziers in each of the controlled industries

[3] See, for example, G. L. Wood, 'Wheat Pools. With Special Reference to Australia', *Economic Record*, Supplement, February 1928, p. 24.

[4] Millar Smith, op. cit., p. 13.

[5] For the history of the Central Wool Committee's operations see Beasley, op. cit., pp. 24-9; Millar Smith, op. cit., pp. 25-32; *British Australian Wool Realisation Association Ltd., Report of General and Extraordinary Meetings*, 17 May 1923, pp. 31-4; *John Cooke & Co. Proprietary Ltd.*, and *Field* v. *The Commonwealth and the Central Wool Committee*, 1922, 31 C.L.R., 394.

developed something of a love-hate relationship with their respective pools, appreciating their advantages while resenting their restrictions. However, the reactions of wheat farmers to their scheme were by far the most important. The most common initial attitude was one of unqualified hostility; the conservative leadership of the New South Wales F.S.A., backed by a number of branches, resorted to legal action in an attempt to establish that the New South Wales government's 1914 Wheat Acquisition Act was unconstitutional, but their case, although accepted by the Interstate Commission, was rejected by the High Court.[6] 'I never liked the Wheat Pool,' said the Association's president in 1916, 'and I don't think the farmers of this country like it. The farmers stand for freedom, let the farmer do the best he can for himself and he will do the best for the State.'[7]

As bureaucracies the wheat pools were not impressive; farmers complained that their accounting methods were inefficient, that delays in payment could have been avoided (in New South Wales and Victoria, for example, the suppliers of the 1915-16 pool were paid in six instalments, the last of which they received on 30 September 1919)[8] and that storage facilities were inadequate. Bagged wheat stacked in the open deteriorated and was invaded by a plague of mice; from the Western Wimmera, Victoria, came the report in April 1917 that 'the enormous stacks [between Wail and Rainbow] present an appearance of devastation which suggests their having been struck by a cyclone. With but few exceptions they are destitute of roofing, and are alive with mice.'[9] Rumours of corruption affected the pools' reputation from the beginning, and were given firmer currency in July 1919, when W. C. Grahame, the New South Wales Minister of Agriculture, was accused of having approved a handling contract for three million bushels of wheat without the authority of either the State cabinet or the Wheat Board, and without inviting competition from other firms. Although this affair was studied by a Royal Commission, Grahame's culpability was not established, and he resigned in the midst of the ensuing public controversy.[10] A further complaint made by some farmers about the Wheat Board was that its prices were much lower than those ruling in London, suggesting that traders and shippers had siphoned off more than their share of the profits.[11]

[6] *The State of New South Wales* v. *The Commonwealth*, 1915, 20 C.L.R., 54. See also N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1915, pp. 5, 7, 12.

[7] Ibid., 1916, p. 18.

[8] *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin* (Adelaide), July 1921, p. 86.

[9] *Argus*, 28 Apr. 1917.

[10] H. V. Evatt, *Australian Labour Leader, The Story of W.A. Holman and the Labour Movement*, abridged edition, pp. 360-2 and 369. See the statement by G. S. Beeby, *N.S.W.P.D.*, vol. 75, 20 Aug. 1919, pp. 101-16.

[11] This was a charge made frequently by W. C. Hill, President of the Victorian Farmers' Union. See *Argus* (Melbourne), 10 Jan. 1917.

For all these objections, however, the small farmers came to realize that the wheat pool had given them higher prices and greater security than they had enjoyed under the unregulated market. 'Why', asked a South Australian farmer in 1919,

> relinquish a system that is just gaining a sound foundation, for one whereby we know the merchants get the better of the deal by their rings, combines, and 'honourable understandings'? . . . I contend the continuance of the principle of the Pool system is far better for us than to be placed at the tender mercies of the merchants, who will make thousands of pounds annually out of our wheat, and this money should go into the pockets of the producers.[12]

By 1916 the established farmers' organizations, such as the F.S.As. of New South Wales and Western Australia, were pairing their demand for improved administration of the wheat scheme with a request that farmers should be admitted to its controlling bodies. In these efforts they were joined by two new associations, the Victorian Farmers' Union (formed in 1916) and the South Australian F.S.A. (formed at the end of 1915). To place their case before the Commonwealth authorities, these four bodies formed, in mid-1916, the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation (A.F.F.O.), which was later to become the spearhead of the wheat farmers' campaign to have the pools established on a permanent basis in the post-war period.

At first, however, the farmers' organizations concentrated on the immediate objective of securing the inclusion of growers' representatives on the Australian and State Wheat Boards. Their first success came in March 1917 when the Commonwealth government agreed to include a farmers' nominee on the central Wheat Board,[13] and Clement Giles, a director of the South Australian Farmers' Co-operative Union Ltd and the A.F.F.O.'s candidate, was elected to the position by a large majority in a poll of growers.[14] In 1919 he was joined by three other farmers' representatives, R. S. Drummond, manager of the New South Wales wheat scheme, W. C. Hill, president of the V.F.U., and S. J. McGibbon, a director of Westralian Farmers.[15] The growers had also been granted representation on most of the State committees by this time, and the importance of these gains soon became apparent. From Hill and Giles came a steady flow of information about problems of chartering ships, London selling rituals, agency and insurance arrangements, and so on,[16] and when they declared that the pool could be continued after the war as a farmers' concern their words carried weight. The idea of a producers' syndicate, or compulsory marketing

[12] *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin*, Mar. 1919, p. 369.

[13] See *Argus*, 8 Mar. 1917.

[14] Ibid., 8, 9 Aug. 1917.

[15] 'The Australian Wheat Pooling Scheme. A Brief Review', p. 13.

[16] For example, see the account of Hill's report to the V.F.U. Central Council, *Argus*, 2 June 1919.

organization, was now established; farm groups declared that they wanted the state to give the pool a monopoly of the grain business in Australia and to vest the control of prices and selling arrangements in a council dominated by producers.

As soon as farmers' organizations adopted this policy of pressing for the continuation of the wheat pool after the war, they were forced to operate on a much broader front than they had done, as conventional pressure groups, when the scheme was established. In fact, one of the first demands made on the new country parties was that they should put pressure on the State governments to ensure that farmers' co-operative companies were accorded special privileges in the agency and handling side of the scheme's operations. In Western Australia, after the Country Party had joined a coalition with the State Nationalists in June 1917, it used its influence to secure for Westralian Farmers Ltd the contract for handling the 1917-18 and subsequent wheat crops.[17] In Victoria, the Farmers' Union and its small parliamentary group assisted the Victorian Producers' Co-operative Company to gain a place in the state wheat scheme[18] and in New South Wales the F.S.A. successfully backed the Farmers and Graziers' Co-operative Grain, Insurance, and Agency Co. (formed in 1918) in its claims for handling rights.[19]

Although nothing approaching this degree of interest in compulsory marketing affected other rural sections, we do find that small graziers and mixed farmers were impressed by the advantages of the wool marketing scheme also. Unlike the big woolgrower, who usually ran merino flocks, the small man reared crossbreds, partly because he could sell them for mutton, and partly because merinos were not suited to the type of land he was frequently forced to farm. At best, crossbred wool brought two-thirds the price of merino fleece—sometimes it fell as low as one-third. In July 1914, for example, the London prices for coarse and medium crossbred fleece ranged from 15½d. to 18d. per lb, while those for merino fleece between counts 60/64 and 70 ranged from 30d. to 32d. per lb.[20] Besides, while Australian merino growers had a virtual monopoly of fine wool supplies on the world market, crossbred growers were competing with suppliers from New Zealand, South Africa and South America. Even when they were reasonably satisfied about prices, the small graziers found that wool sales by the auction system, built up in Australia by such firms as Goldsbrough,

[17] 'Interim Report of the Royal Commission on the Wheat Marketing Scheme', Pap. 4, pp. v-vi, *W.A.P.P.*, 1918, vol. I. See also *West Australian* (Perth), 28 Nov. 1918.

[18] D. S. Oman, the Victorian Minister of Agriculture, listed the agents for the Victorian Pool in 1919 (*V.P.D.*, vol. 153, 22 Oct. 1919, p. 1841).

[19] See W. A. Bayley, *History of the Farmers and Settlers' Association of N.S.W.*, pp. 138-9.

[20] See *British Australian Wool Realisation Association Ltd., Annual Report for year ended 31 December 1922*, p. 21 (all quotations on clean scoured basis).

Mort and Co. Ltd and Elder Smith and Co. Ltd,[21] worked to the advantage of the large grower; he, because of the size of his clip, could sell his wool in relatively uniform lots, while the small man was forced to offer his in mixed lots which were often poorly graded and ignored by important buyers. When the Central Wool Committee took over the handling of the 1916-17 clip, it introduced a Table of Limits, a more systematic method of classing wool than the pre-war practice,[22] and thereby ensured a fairer and more profitable grading of small crossbred lots. Under the wartime scheme, however, the crossbred grower received double the pre-war price for his wool,[23] and found himself selling on a steady market and able to budget ahead securely in planning his capital expenditure.

As may be expected, the small grower's enthusiasm for the scheme was not shared by the large merino growers, who looked forward to high prices when open market conditions were resumed; nor were most of the wealthy organizations, such as the Pastoralists' Union of Southern Riverina, and the Pastoralists' Association of West Darling, greatly in favour of the pool. An exception was the Graziers' Association of New South Wales (the former Pastoralists' Union), based on eastern New South Wales, which resolved at its 1919 conference to request the Australian government to approach the British government with a view to continuing the wool scheme until 1923.[24] This and other motions reflected the presence in this Association of the large number of small graziers who had joined it immediately before and during the war. Its proposals were hardly as radical as those of the farm groups with reference to the wheat scheme but, seen against the background of the conservative and *laissez-faire* traditions of the pastoral industry, they were a significant departure from orthodoxy.

When the various commodity pools had been first introduced in 1914 and 1915, they had been regarded as an administrative response to an unusual emergency; there was no suggestion that a new area of public control was being surveyed. By the middle of the war, however, the state was controlling the sale at home and abroad of all the wool, wheat, meat and dairy produce grown in Australia, and several producer groups which had objected to the pooling schemes in the first instance were now weighing their advantages. By 1917 and 1918, many

[21] On the history of the wool trade in Australia see Alan Barnard, 'A Century and a Half of Wool Marketing', *The Simple Fleece*, ed. Barnard, pp. 475-89, and his *The Australian Wool Market, 1840-1900*.

[22] The full Table of Limits is given in Sir John M. Higgins, *The Stabilisation or the Equalisation or the Insurance of Wool Values*, pp. 117-204.

[23] The average price per lb of greasy Australian wool came to 18·94d. (including 3·44d. profit) during the period of the Central Wool Committee's operations (1916-20), compared with the 1913-14 average of 9·625d. per lb (*British Australian Wool Realisation Association Ltd., Fourth Annual Report for year ended 31 December 1924*, Appendix A, p. 19).

[24] *N.S.W. Graziers' Annual, 1919*, p. 27.

wheat farmers were in favour of continuing the wheat pool after the war, and small graziers were considering the extension of the wool pool for a period. In other words there was taking place a fundamental change in rural values. Before 1914, marketing issues had not been regarded as being as important as those connected with tariff policy, public works development, land legislation and arbitration policy; the practices of grain merchants and wool brokers had been resented but there had been no widespread demand that the state should take over the sale and purchase of primary produce and eliminate the middleman. Inasmuch as wheat farmers had considered regulating the conditions of their market, they had thought in terms of forming co-operative trading companies and using the bulk-handling method of transporting grain. On the whole, however, they had shared the trader's attachment to the free market, and were willing to endure a series of bad seasons in the hope that a good one would float them out of debt. It was their experience of compulsory marketing during the war which convinced many growers, particularly the small men, that security lay in a system of state-financed and grower-controlled marketing corporations, from which the old proprietary trading companies would be excluded. This was state corporatism rather than state socialism.

Not only did their acquaintance with the working of the growers' pool radically alter the outlook of the most important farming group, the wheatgrowers, and ultimately give the post-war Country Parties of Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales their distinctive economic policy; it was the demanding task of coming to grips with the wartime pools which gave the final stimulus to the formation of the country parties. The long-drawn-out business of agitating for improved pool management, for the admission of growers' representatives to the Australian and State Wheat Boards, for the admission of farmers' co-operative companies to a special position in the handling business of the pool and, later on, for the extension of the wheat scheme beyond the scheduled expiry date—all these activities brought farmers' organizations into political spheres which they had explored but tentatively in the past. If they had achieved so much as pressure groups, would not much more be gained if they could project independent country parties into parliament? Thus, while the factors which had given rise to the country party movement in the first place—the agrarian tradition, the economic insecurity of the wheat industry and the accumulation of organizational experience—were still present in the situation, it was the sheer pace of wartime politics which shook the farmers from their lethargy. Much more seriously than ever before, they addressed themselves to the problems of electoral strategy.

The Anti-Labor Trend of the Farmers' Organizations, 1914-1916

Traditionally, the established farmers' organizations in Australia had opposed the Labor Party, and until the time of World War I, any

desire to press for the formation of an independent country party was balanced by the need to maintain the electoral strength of anti-Labor forces. Consequently, the type of country party envisaged was one which, while enjoying a degree of electoral and parliamentary autonomy, would nevertheless work closely with the Liberal Party and, particularly in New South Wales and Queensland, bear the brunt of the anti-Labor campaign in rural areas. This approach held good until the end of 1916, when the split in the Labor Party over the conscription issue dictated a reconsideration of the farm groups' policies. The reconsideration took different forms in the various States.

In Queensland, where the Farmers' Union had been shaken by Labor's victory in the State election of 22 May 1915 and by the Ryan government's subsequent policies, the Q.F.U.'s five-member parliamentary group, led by J. G. Appel, soon merged itself with the Liberal Opposition.[25] In March 1916 the Q.F.U. finally joined with the Liberal Association in forming a National Political Council to co-ordinate the anti-Labor movement and to collect funds from Brisbane business interests.[26]

In Western Australia, whose farming regions were suffering from a severe drought when war broke out, the Country Party had no course but to support the Scaddan Labor government returned at the election of 21 October 1914. The position was serious: from 13·3 million bushels in 1913-14, the wheat crop dropped to 2·6 million bushels in 1914-15; the average yield per acre for the State fell from 12·2 to 1·9 bushels, while twenty of the thirty districts of the Northern Agricultural Division had yields of less than one bushel per acre in 1914;[27] stores and private banks stopped giving credit and many settlers, especially those who had taken up land after 1910, faced bankruptcy and foreclosure.[28] James Gardiner, leader of the eight-member Country Party, told the Assembly on 8 December that it was the people's wish

[25] See Appel's explanation, *Q.P.D.*, vol. 126, 11 July 1917, p. 102, and Brisbane *Courier*, 17, 24 June, 9 Sept., 12 Dec. 1915; *Producers' Review* (Toowoomba), 10 Oct. 1915, pp. 34-6 and 40. See also Z. Abidin, 'The Origins and Development of the Queensland Country Party, 1909-1932', M.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1958, pp. 54-71.

[26] Brisbane *Courier*, 14 Feb., 29 Mar., 24 Apr., 16 Aug. 1916; *Producers' Review*, 10 May 1917, pp. 22-3.

[27] E. and L. Dunsdorfs, *Historical Statistics of the Australian Wheatgrowing Industry. Acreage and Average Yield in Counties and Divisions, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, 1792-1950*, p. 88.

[28] See T. Langford-Smith, 'Water Supply in the Agricultural Areas of Western Australia', pp. 140-1; W.A. F.S.A. Executive Minutes, 1912-16, 13 Aug. 1914, pp. 89-91; *West Australian*, 21 Sept. 1914; *W.A.P.D.*, vol. 50, 12 Jan. 1915, pp. 520-4. On the record of the Scaddan government see J. R. Robertson, 'The Foundations of State Socialism in Western Australia: 1911-16', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, x, 39, Nov. 1962, pp. 309-26.

that there should be a 'legitimate truce', and that his party would support the government in passing legislation for the good of the state.[29] Throughout the session of December 1914-March 1915 the Country Party did in fact give the Scaddan Ministry every help in putting through such important relief measures as the Grain and Foodstuffs Act, under which grain was purchased by the State to keep prices down and ensure a supply of seed wheat, and the Industries Assistance Act, aimed to provide financial aid to farmers on a scale not then possible through the Agricultural Bank.[30]

Had he been given his head, Gardiner, who was a progressive man and an experienced politician, might well have held the Western Australian Country Party to a centre position, maintaining the balance of power between the Liberal and Labor Parties and providing support to governments in return for concessions. But the idea of an independent rather than an anti-Labor strategy was anathema to the conservative members of the F.S.A., who now began to work against him. On 12 March 1915, when the members of the Country Party and the F.S.A. Executive met in joint conference for the first time, it was decided to appoint a new parliamentary leader.[31] Gardiner was ill at the time of the meeting but he resigned six days afterwards. Although the reasons for his virtual deposition were not made clear, one of the executive members later implied that his willingness to work with Labor had been the principal objection.[32]

F. E. S. Willmott, the party's deputy leader who was chosen as his successor, was not a strong man, and the parliamentary party came increasingly under the control of the F.S.A.'s president, Alex Monger. The latter proceeded cautiously to change Gardiner's policies. He could not immediately commit the Country Party to an alliance with the Liberals, partly because the Labor government was still in the midst of its agricultural relief programme and partly because the F.S.A.'s radical wheat-belt branches might resist a sudden swing to the right. Nevertheless, the tension between the Association's radical and conservative wings was evident at its conference of August 1915. On this occasion the executive's attempt to widen the organization's full-membership requirements was strongly opposed by Gardiner and the wheat-belt delegates, mainly on the grounds that the changes proposed would expose the Association to the threat of being swamped by country-townsmen and Liberal supporters. As a result, the original proposal was dropped and one which admitted to membership those

[29] *W.A.P.D.*, vol. 50, 8 Dec. 1914, pp. 67-8.

[30] Ibid., 10 Dec. 1914, pp. 201-4, 212-13; 13 Jan. 1915, pp. 635-9. On the Industries Assistance Board see G. Taylor, *The Agricultural Bank and Industries Assistance Board*, pp. 52-68.

[31] W.A. F.S.A. Executive Minutes, 1912-16, 12 Mar. 1915, p. 127.

[32] Letter from W. E. Courthope, *West Australian*, 17 Aug. 1915.

engaged in 'mining, timber or other primary industries' in addition to farmers and graziers was adopted by 180 votes to 54.[33] There was, however, no serious discussion of the part the parliamentary party should play in the Assembly; only C. J. Moran, an executive member, suggested that the F.S.A. should definitely advise the Country Party whether or not to oppose the Scaddan government.[34]

Both Gardiner and T. H. Harrison, meanwhile, were voting for some government measures in the Assembly and Gardiner's influence over his colleagues was clearly still important. One member of the F.S.A. Executive resigned on the grounds that Gardiner had persuaded Willmott to agree to a truce with the Labor government during the absence overseas of one of its ministers[35] and in September the F.S.A. Executive decided to send Gardiner a letter 'objecting to him always being the apologist for the bad administration of the present Government'.[36] In November the executive convened another joint conference with the Country Party and instructed the latter's members to support an impending Liberal censure motion.[37] Gardiner's absence from the meeting was noted with displeasure but he finally voted with the rest of the party for the motion, which was defeated by one vote.[38] This division nevertheless signified that the co-operation between the Labor and Country Parties was at an end and that it would only be a matter of time before the Country Party came to terms with the Liberals.

During the recess of 1915-16 the Labor government lost two seats, and thereby its majority in the Legislative Assembly, the party position in the lower House becoming: Labor 24, Liberal 17, Country Party 8 and Independent 1.[39] As the Country Party members now held the balance of power, their strategy for the coming session was particularly important. On 9 March 1916, they conferred with the F.S.A. Executive and it was decided that the party should again support any Liberal no-confidence motion. However, a resolution in favour of a Liberal-Country Party coalition was defeated, and a ban placed on conferences with the Liberals until after the government had been removed from office.[40] Monger chose to ignore the latter prohibition, however, mainly because the poor Country Party showing in the

[33] W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1915, pp. 18-32.

[34] Ibid., p. 49.

[35] *West Australian*, 17 Aug. 1915.

[36] W.A. F.S.A. Executive Minutes, 1912-16, 9 Sept. 1915, p. 147.

[37] Ibid., 10 Nov. 1915, pp. 155-7.

[38] *W.A.P.D.*, vol. 52, 11 Nov. 1915, p. 2418.

[39] A Liberal candidate won the former Labor seat of Roebourne at a by-election on 17 November 1915 and E. B. Johnston (Williams-Narrogin), having resigned from the Labor Party, was re-elected as an Independent in a by-election on 9 January 1916.

[40] W.A. F.S.A. Executive Minutes, 1912-16, 9 Mar. 1916, pp. 167-9.

Legislative Council elections of May suggested to him that a formal alliance involving an electoral agreement was desirable.[41] Encouraged by him, six delegates from the Country Party met six Liberal Party delegates on 24 May and decided that the two organizations would co-operate in an attempt to defeat the government, the Country Party undertaking to support any Liberal ministry that might then be formed (provided it protected the primary industries), and the Liberals agreeing to a common policy which envisaged inquiries into the working of the Industries Assistance Board, the agricultural industry, rail and water charges, and the possibility of introducing the bulk-handling system of transporting wheat. At a further meeting on 13 June, however, the Liberals refused to accept a proposal that thirteen agricultural seats (including three Liberal and two Labor seats besides the eight already held by the Country Party) should be allocated to the Country Party. Monger's role as mediator in these negotiations was crucial; he apparently contemplated the eventual formation of a coalition government, and was doubtful whether the F.S.A.'s annual conference would lend its approval to such a course in the absence of an electoral agreement. In a letter to Frank Wilson, the Liberal leader, he had said:

> Although we think our conference will ratify the working political policy so far provisionally agreed to between us, and might even be prepared later on to share administrative responsibilities (provided our identity is strictly maintained, and we receive a fair allotment of the country seats), we do not think there is any chance of us coming together in a working arangement, such as that suggested by you, and already outlined by me.[42]

In subsequent public statements, Monger said that it would be unwise to advise a coalition under 'existing circumstances' but that he would oppose the Country Party's supporting another Labor government.[43] Finally, on 25 July, the Scaddan government was defeated in the Assembly and on the 27th Wilson took office at the head of a Liberal Ministry, assured of Country Party support. Presented with a *fait accompli*, the F.S.A.'s annual conference, held in August, approved the part played by the F.S.A. Executive in helping to bring down the government but at the same time declared against Country Party members accepting posts in a coalition cabinet. Monger was at his most persuasive in putting the position to the conference:

> As the Labor Party's socialistic policy and platform . . . is so diametrically opposed to our platform, our aims and objects, and as their administration is so extravagant and bad, I maintain that in the

[41] This is suggested by one of his subsequent statements (*West Australian*, 30 June 1916).

[42] This quotation and the conference details above are from ibid., 15 June 1916.

[43] Ibid., 30 June, 13 July 1916.

> interests of the State, and more especially in respect to our own interests, we are compelled to marshall our forces in opposition to them.

The Liberals, he assured the delegates, would not neglect country interests in future.[44] The absence of a radical protest at this conference may be attributed partly to the fact that better seasons had made wheat farmers less anxious for drastic parliamentary action, but the main reason was probably that the F.S.A.'s left wing lacked a man of sufficient stature to challenge Monger. There was one intriguing reference at the 1915 conference to a 'Little Country Party', led by W. J. Martin of Stoney Crossing, which felt that the F.S.A. Executive was too much under Liberal influence[45] but nothing came of it. By the end of 1916, then, the Western Australian Country Party seemed well on the way to dependence on the Liberal Party.

In New South Wales things were very different, for the F.S.A. was in a good position to drive a hard electoral bargain with the Liberal Party. If the latter was to displace the New South Wales Labor government, which had a majority of ten in the ninety-member Assembly, it would have to win back from Labor the vital rural seats of the Tablelands and Riverina regions, an impossible task without the aid of the F.S.A., whose branch concentration was heavy in a number of Labor's marginal electorates. While the members of the F.S.A. Executive were willing, as they had been in 1913, to have their Association serve as the vanguard of the rural offensive against Labor, they were determined that this time the members returned by their efforts would not immediately lose their identity in the Liberal Party. This helps to explain their unusual compact with George S. Beeby, a former Labor politician who attended the 1915 conference of the F.S.A. and spoke about forming a new anti-Labor force, the Progressive Party. He said that:

> his object was to see whether or not the Farmers and Settlers' Association would form a new rallying ground or jumping-off point round which people opposed to the present Government could gather in future.[46]

Beeby was a Sydney lawyer who had been a prominent member of the State Labor Party until his resignation from the McGowen cabinet on 9 December 1912 after a clash over the Federal Labor government's proposal to hold another 'powers' referendum. Returned as an Inde-

[44] W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1916, pp. 4-5.

[45] Ibid., 1915, pp. 18 and 20.

[46] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1915, p. 36. For the details of the Progressive Party venture (1915-16) see U. R. Ellis, *The Country Party, A Political and Social History of the Party in New South Wales*, pp. 42-6. Ellis (pp. 45-6) brings out well the contrast between Beeby and the farmers with whom he had to work.

pendent in the Blayney by-election of January 1913, he had later toyed with the idea of forming a National Progressive Party, but his candidates had been hopelessly defeated in the State election of December 1913—hence his search for a more secure organizational base, a search which had brought him to the F.S.A. leaders, who were in their turn pleased to be dealing with an experienced politician. In fact, however, Beeby's ideas did not strictly accord with those of the F.S.A.; he wanted to form a broad-based non-Labor Party, with an urban as well as a rural wing, which he hoped would one day displace the Liberal Party, whereas the F.S.A. leaders were more interested in contracting an agreement with the Liberals which would provide for the electoral and parliamentary independence of anti-Labor country members. Their conflict of views did not become important at this stage but it was to have an important effect on the New South Wales country party movement in the early twenties.

Under strong pressure from its executive, the F.S.A. conference of 1915 fell in with Beeby's proposals and adopted a 'Progressive Party' platform, authorizing a 'Political Executive Committee', which consisted of members of the F.S.A. Executive along with Walter Bennett, Beeby, R. T. Ball (M.L.A.) and J. T. Crane (M.L.A.), to confer with C. G. Wade, the Liberal leader, about the consolidation of the anti-Labor forces.[47] The Committee met representatives of the Liberal Party in September 1915 and again in February 1916. As a result, arrangements were made for a joint campaign against Labor in rural areas, the Progressive Party being allocated twelve (later eighteen) seats as its preserve with the understanding that retiring Liberal members should be given the option of standing for re-election either as Liberals or Progressives; and it was further agreed that candidates of both organizations should 'undertake to vote together on all questions relating to the removal and keeping the Labor Party from power'.[48]

Formal arrangements for the Progressive Party's campaign were endorsed by the F.S.A.'s 1916 conference, which was assured both by A. K. Trethowan (president) and by Beeby that the defeat of the Labor Party must remain its objective. Branches of the Association were empowered to collect funds and form election committees,[49] and from July onwards they set about canvassing local support and selecting candidates.[50] In August the Association's General Secretary, T. I. Camp-

[47] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1915, pp. 56-65, 72-8.

[48] *Minute Book of the Political Committee of the Progressive Party*, 1915-16, pp. 7-21.

[49] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1916, pp. 20-8, 70-1.

[50] See *Land* (Sydney), 28 July, 4 Aug. 1916; N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1917, p. 5; *Minute Book of the Mt. Russell Branch of the F.S.A.*, 1914-19, 1 July 1916, p. 38. Wearne Papers, pamphlet entitled 'Namoi Progressive League' and dated 15 Sept. 1916, gives details of the Progressive Party's efforts to organize the Namoi constituency.

bell, summed up his executive's expectations in the following telegram to the Western Australian F.S.A.

> Our objective is to remove the existing Government. The Progressives will contest about 20 seats, and will support Liberal administration in order to secure electoral reform. Progressives not taking portfolios in Liberal Ministry. With electoral reform no further bargaining will be necessary.[51]

This telegram brings out the similarity between the strategies of the New South Wales and Western Australian Associations. Both wanted their country party to be anti-Labor and yet independent of the Liberal Party; both felt that this independence could be preserved only if the parliamentary party refused to accept portfolios in Liberal cabinets; both wanted to increase their electoral autonomy, the latter by forcing the Liberals to allocate a specified zone to the Country Party, the former, by obliging the Liberals to change the electoral law to permit alternative voting, probably on the Western Australian and Victorian model of the preferential voting system. Both had in practice rejected the strategy of declaring that the country party was independent of both the Labor and Liberal Parties and that it would grant support only in return for concessions. Yet certain questions remained unanswered: how could an anti-Labor country party, committed in principle to vote against Labor, hope to exercise a continuing influence on the policy of a Liberal administration unless it accepted cabinet posts? And if it accepted cabinet posts, how was it to preserve its parliamentary and electoral independence?

The anti-Labor trend of the country party movements in Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland was counter-balanced in 1916 by the unexpected appearance of a radical organization, the Victorian Farmers' Union (V.F.U.), which drew its most militant and enthusiastic support from the marginal wheat lands of the Mallee. This region, extending from northern Victoria into the adjacent districts of South Australia, lies chiefly between the 10″ and 15″ isohyets and has a light and irregular rainfall; the pastoralists who settled near it in the nineteenth century let their sheep and cattle find what fodder they could amongst the stretches of Mallee scrub which dominated the landscape. The Victorian Lands Commissioners who travelled through it in 1878 found it a wilderness—'sand, scrub, and Mallee below, the scorching sun and bright blue sky above, and not a sound of life to break the solemn silence'.[52] However, under the Victorian Mallee Pastoral Leases Act 1883 and the South Australian Scrub Lands Act 1877 the region was gradually brought under control; runs were fenced, some attempt was made to get rid of the rabbits and wild dogs, and methods of cultivation suited to Mallee conditions were

[51] W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1916, p. 13.

[52] 'Report of the Crown Lands Commission of Inquiry . . .', Pap. 73, p. viii, *V.P.P.*, 1879-80, vol. III.

introduced. First the scrub was broken with huge rollers and burnt, and then the soil was worked by means of the stump-jump plough and giant harrows; by such methods the costs of clearing for wheat were cut from £4-£5 to as low as 10s. per acre.[53] In addition, the techniques of 'dry-farming', involving the use of a long fallow period, were now well advanced. As a result the area under wheat in the Victorian Mallee jumped from 54,154 acres in 1890 to 669,658 acres in 1900. The 1902 drought checked further expansion until between 1909 and 1915 the acreage in the district rose from 558,659 to 1,275,122.[54] The Mallee was, in fact, the last of Australia's agricultural frontiers—and certainly the most vulnerable. The settlement allotments of 640 to 1,000 acres were not large enough, given the variable quality of the soil and the light rainfall; because of the scarcity of natural streams, droughts affected the Mallee much more severely than they did other regions (during the 1914 drought, for example, wheat yields per acre dropped to 0·5 in Millewa county, 0·2 in Weeah and 0·4 in Karkarooc and Tatchera);[55] and outside the established settlements in the east and south-east of the district where some mixed farming could be carried on, the farmers were heavily dependent on the success or failure of the wheat crop.[56] 'Other wheat-growers have their sheep, wool, lambs, etc. bringing in a steady income before harvest,' noted one of the Mallee men, 'but the newer settled Mallee farmers have none of these things.'[57]

Precisely because so many of them were new to the region, and were so insecure and dependent on the fortunes of the wheat industry, the wheat men of the Mallee paid a great deal of attention to the wartime wheat pool; it is not too much to say that they joined the country party movement primarily to press their demands for the reform of the pool's administration and for its continuance as a permanent marketing institution. Their leader in this campaign was Percy Gerald Stewart, one of the few genuinely radical leaders of the early country parties, whose frail figure and sensitive, remarkably intelligent face stand out from among his colleagues in group photographs. Born on 18 October 1885, he spent his boyhood in a Melbourne industrial suburb, working in a bottle factory in the evenings for 7s. a week. After leaving school, he was employed in railway construction gangs and later came to the Mallee as a shepherd under the employ of E. H. Lascelles, one of the

[53] 'Report from the Select Committee upon the Settlement of the Mallee Country', Pap. D-4, p.v, *V.P.P.*, 1891, vol. 1. See also *Age* (Melbourne), 2 Nov. 1889; 14 July 1890; Brian Fitzpatrick, *British Empire in Australia*, 2nd ed., pp. 151-2.

[54] E. and L. Dunsdorfs, *Historical Statistics of the Australian Wheatgrowing Industry*, pp. 26-9.

[55] Ibid., p. 40.

[56] For a description of the Mallee country see 'Royal Commission on the Wheat, Flour and Bread Industries', First Report, p. 17, *C.P.P.*, 1932-33-34.

[57] Letter from P. G. Stewart, *Argus*, 1 Jan. 1917.

region's largest landowners. He lost his job during the 1902 drought and worked for a time in Gippsland before joining a British sailing ship in 1905. During his four years abroad he visited both Europe and America, serving as an agricultural labourer in the United States and Canada before buying a farm in the latter country. He returned to Australia in 1909 on the death of his father and was attracted once again to the Mallee where, after a spell of sharefarming, he selected 630 acres of land at Carwarp, near Mildura, in 1913. Once established, he worked through the Carwarp Progress Association to organize the Mallee farmers into a union along the lines of the Grain Associations he must have seen in Canada, but in June 1916, just before the planned inaugural conference, he learnt that another such movement was gaining headway in the southern farming districts and decided to stay his hand.[58] The other body was a provisional one, founded at a Fern Hill meeting on 15 April, after the two moving spirits behind it—J. J. Hall and Isaac Hart, both of whom were journalists—had conducted a press campaign to arouse enthusiasm for a farmers' organization.[59] In June, Stewart joined forces with them, and the three men worked to establish the movement, known as the Victorian Farmers' Union, on as broad a base as possible.[60] When its first annual conference was held in September 1916 the V.F.U. already comprised 130 branches and 2,836 members. Its delegates decided to establish an independent country party, adopted a platform which included a demand for appointing farmers' representatives to marketing boards, and approved a draft constitution which restricted membership of the Union to primary producers and provided that parliamentary candidates endorsed by the Union should pledge themselves to support the platform.[61] The Union's Central Council, elected by the conference, now took over the organization of the body's activities; in January 1917 the first issues of its official journal, the *Farmers' Advocate*, appeared and branches began forming district councils.

That three-fifths of the delegates at the founding conference were from the northern wheat districts indicated the importance of the wheat pool issue in generating the enthusiasm which gave the Union its

[58] *Farmers' Advocate* (Melbourne), 20 Nov. 1919. Other Mallee leaders are said to have met at Boort in 1914 with the object of forming a political organization. See *Countryman* (Melb.), 28 Sept. 1956, cited by Ellis, *History of the Australian Country Party*, p. 30n.

[59] The southern movement is sometimes dated to 1914, when a Woodend meeting discussed the possibility of electing farmers' candidates to Parliament (see Ellis, op. cit., pp. 30-1), but the effective mass contacts were made only in 1916.

[60] Ellis, op. cit., pp. 33-4. Ellis has based his account on MS. notes by J. J. Hall on the origins of the V.F.U., and on Isaac Hart's obituary notice (*Countryman* (Melb.), 18 May 1961). See also ibid., 8 Aug. 1924.

[61] *Victorian Farmers' Union, Minutes 1916 Conference*, Stock and Land Print, Melbourne, [1916].

early momentum, but once formed it attracted support from other disgruntled groups as well—dairy farmers who resented the federal government's action in fixing butter prices, and Goulburn Valley irrigation settlers who wanted the repeal of a clause in the State Closer Settlement Act which prevented them from acquiring the freehold of their leases. What most distinguished the V.F.U. from its northern neighbour, the New South Wales F.S.A., was its radicalism, and its willingness to take political risks. Men like Isaac Hart and Percy Stewart had long since been excluded from the leadership of the New South Wales body, and the following declaration by Hart (to a Kerang audience in July 1916) would have been frowned upon in F.S.A. circles as being in bad taste:

> Some have suggested that we should keep out of politics and form co-operative societies, but that is not sufficient. We must go into Parliament and make one voice felt there, but only by a pledge those who represent us must do what we want. There will be no dictation until we have power in Parliament. Members of the Government and Parliament are merely putty in the hands of an organisation—now we must try and get our hands upon that putty.[62]

At this stage, there was no suggestion that the V.F.U. would be an anti-Labor organization; on the contrary its leaders appeared to be thinking in terms of a less ambitious but more exacting strategy, that of forming a tight nucleus of parliamentary members who, bound by pledges to the platform of the union, would give support in return for concessions and for no other reason.

Agrarian radicalism of the Mallee brand was also a factor in South Australian politics, particularly in the districts enclosed by the State electorate of Albert, but it was kept in check by the conservative oligarchy of the South Australian F.S.A. This body had been formed in 1915 by two prominent members of the Liberal Union and, in its official journal, the *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin*, declared against forming a country party, maintaining that the Association would best obtain results by acting as a conventional pressure group and influencing whichever party happened to be in power.[63]

The country party movement in 1916 was still essentially a matter of State politics, despite the close communication between the various farmers' organizations. However, the fact that the War Precautions Act

[62] *Kerang Observer*, 29 July 1916.

[63] The man most responsible for the formation of the Association was J. Entwistle. For its early history see: *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin* (Adelaide), July 1918, p. 229; 'Farmers' & Settlers' Association of S.A.', circular letter signed by the secretary, J. C. Genders, 10 Jan. 1916 (held in the Public Library of South Australia); letter from Genders, dated 15 Dec. 1915, *Sunday Times* (Perth), 26 Dec. 1915, p. 22.

For objections to third parties see *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin*, June 1916, p. 3; Oct. 1916, pp. 13-14.

(1914-16) had temporarily extended the economic power of the Commonwealth government and its agencies challenged the farmers' leaders to think more concretely of action at the federal level. The president of the New South Wales F.S.A., for example, was perturbed to find that price-fixing powers had been transferred from the States to the Commonwealth.

> They were able to bring a certain amount of pressure to bear on their local Governments, but when the Federal Government took it on, unless they had some means of combined representation, he was afraid the primary producers were not going to get justice done.[64]

Such justice was the object of a conference held at Melbourne in September 1916 and attended by representatives of the V.F.U. and the F.S.As. of Western Australia and New South Wales, the latter representing the Q.F.U. They established the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation (A.F.F.O.), drew up a preliminary platform and a common objective, and appointed a deputation to suggest to the Commonwealth government means of improving the Australian wheat pooling scheme.[65] This occasion was significant as marking the first confrontation of the different viewpoints of the V.F.U. and the older organizations. According to the report of the Victorian delegates to their Central Council, the New South Wales and Western Australian representatives suggested that the A.F.F.O. should support the Liberal Party on the understanding that, if returned to power, it would introduce either preferential voting or proportional representation for federal elections, thereby enabling the farmers to run their own candidates for Parliament. 'The proposition was opposed by, and postponed through, the representations of the delegates representing the V.F.U.'[66] The debate about strategy had begun. The established doctrine, that of the New South Wales and Western Australian leaderships, was that the country parties should work with the Liberal Party against Labor and that considerations of party autonomy and freedom of manoeuvre could not be allowed to interfere with that objective; the Victorians, on the other hand, held that the country parties should remain independent of both the Liberal and Labor Parties, and that they should offer support for concessions to whichever party happened to be in power.

The Electoral Breakthrough, 1917-1920

On his return from a visit to England and the war theatre early in 1916, the Labor Prime Minister, W. M. Hughes, decided to hold a

[64] Brisbane *Courier*, 12 Aug. 1916.

[65] Ellis, *Australian Country Party*, p. 38.

[66] *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 1, 21 Feb. 1917, p. 41. For the full text of this part of the report see B. D. Graham, 'The Choice of Voting Methods in Federal Politics, 1902-1918', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, VIII, 2, Nov. 1962, p. 171.

referendum to determine whether conscription should be introduced in Australia. This decision aroused strong opposition both from those groups in the labour movement who felt that the government had unnecessarily shelved its measures for social reform and those, influenced by Irish Nationalist and Socialist ideas, who disliked the war and the principle of compulsory military service. The referendum proposal was narrowly defeated at the polls on 28 October, but it had already produced a crisis of major proportions in the Labor Party. On 14 November Hughes and his supporters walked out of a meeting of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party and were promptly expelled by it. He then formed a cabinet from amongst his followers, came to terms with the Liberals, joined them in founding a new National Party, and, on 17 February 1917, formed yet another ministry, representing the National Party but including four of his 'National Labor' colleagues. The official Labor Party, greatly reduced in numbers, glowered at him from the Opposition benches.[67]

The State Labor Parties split in every State except Queensland, where T. J. Ryan, the Labor Premier, had opposed conscription from the outset and held his government secure throughout the crisis. Elsewhere the following pattern held true: the conscriptionists broke away and called themselves a National Labor Party while the anti-conscriptionists, who in every case controlled the party's extra-parliamentary institutions, retained the title of the Official Labor Party. In New South Wales the Labor Premier, W. A. Holman, led the conscriptionist revolt and, like Hughes, persuaded his followers to merge with the Liberals in a National Party; he formed a National Party government in December 1916 and won a decisive victory in the State elections of 26 March 1917. Labor had also been in power in South Australia, but the defection of the National Laborites enabled the State Liberals to defeat its ministry in the House; the Liberal leader, A. H. Peake, then formed an interim government and later a coalition government which included some of the Labor rebels. In Western Australia a Liberal Ministry was succeeded on 28 June by a coalition government consisting of representatives of the Liberal, National Labor and Country Parties. In Victoria and Tasmania the Liberal Parties, both in office, called themselves National Parties after absorbing the handful of National Labor men who defected in their States.

The National Party, as its name suggests, was meant to embody solidarity, patriotism and a desire to 'Win-the-War'. It was with this slogan that the Federal National Party won the election of 5 May 1917 by 53 seats to Labor's 22, a contest which the Perth *Primary Producer* described as a 'battle between Success and Sabotage—or Australia and Germany'.[68] It was not surprising, therefore, that all the farmers' organizations except the V.F.U. identified themselves with the new

[67] Geoffrey Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1901-1929*, pp. 132-4.

[68] *Primary Producer* (Perth), 9 Mar. 1917.

movement and stopped trying for the time being to carve out separate territories for their country parties. By mid-1917, indeed, it appeared as though the stability of the Australian two-party system had been restored and that the rural interests would come to terms with the new National Party in a way which had not seemed possible with the old Liberal Party.

The identification was most complete in New South Wales, where the Progressive Party was almost completely absorbed into the State National Party. Holman paved the way for this by bringing George Beeby into his cabinet in December 1916 as Minister for Labour and Industry and by appointing him, along with the F.S.A.'s president and treasurer (A. K. Trethowan and A. E. Hunt), to the Legislative Council. The electoral understanding which the Progressives and Liberals had worked out in 1916 was quietly dropped and the government campaign for the State election of 26 March 1917 was organized by a National Campaign Council, which contained six representatives from each of the National Labor, Liberal and Progressive Parties.[69] In the interests of unity, the Progressive Party withdrew its candidates from all seats held by National Labor members,[70] and the election saw the return of 57 Nationalists (including seven former Progressives) and 33 members of the Labor Party, which had been swept out of the small-farming seats of the central west. The integration of the National Party was taken a step further on 5 July 1917, when the Liberal Association was converted into the National Association of New South Wales. The latter appointed a thirty-member Council, on which the F.S.A. was represented by Beeby, Walter Wearne and J. T. Crane.[71] 'We will give our loyal support to the National movement,' Trethowan told the F.S.A.'s annual conference later in the year, 'and we will not take any action that will tend to bring back the Labour party into power during the war.'[72]

In Western Australia the parliamentary Country Party's readiness to join the National movement reflected the fact that its bargaining position on the corner benches was not a strong one. This had been brought out in February 1917, when the Wilson government had tried to push through a measure, the State Trading Concerns Bill, to which the Country Party had objected on the grounds that it would vest in cabinet the right to dispose of public trading agencies, many of which had been of great assistance to farmers during the 1914-15 agrarian crisis. The absence of several Country Party members during the Committee discussions on the Bill enabled Labor to win four crucial

[69] *S.M.H.*, 20 Feb. 1917. On the formation of the New South Wales National Party see Ken Turner, 'From Liberal to National in New South Wales', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, x, 2, Aug. 1964, pp. 205-20.

[70] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1917, p. 15.

[71] *S.M.H.*, 6 July 1917.

[72] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1917, p. 20.

divisions, and when the Premier complained of this, the Governor initiated discussions which virtually obliged the Country Party to support the government in future.[73] Thus the Country Party was reasonably willing to join with the Liberal and National Labor Parties in May 1917 in forming a united National Party based on the understanding that each of the constituent groups would retain a measure of independence.[74] It was also agreed that a coalition ministry, representing all sections of the new party, should be formed, but under a Premier other than Frank Wilson; the latter was reluctant to surrender office but he eventually agreed to do so and in a series of meetings the National Party chose H. B. Lefroy as its new leader and selected the personnel for a proposed cabinet consisting of four Liberal, three Country Party and two National Labor representatives.[75] Lefroy's cabinet was sworn in on 28 June, and contained as its Country Party members James Gardiner (Treasurer), C. F. Baxter and Frank Willmott (both Honorary Ministers).

When the coalition agreement was reviewed at the F.S.A.'s annual conference in August, it became clear that Gardiner had re-established much of his former authority in the parliamentary party and that it was he who had been mainly responsible for leading the Country Party into the new alliance, acting without the approval of Monger and the F.S.A. Executive. As we have seen, Monger was not against coalitions in principle but he was strongly opposed to the parliamentary group's acting without reference to the F.S.A. He complained to the delegates that the Country Party should not have joined the coalition and the National Party without the Association's consent, especially in view of the resolution of the 1916 conference which prohibited Country Party members from accepting posts in coalition cabinets, and he objected that the National Party's programme did not include enough of the F.S.A.'s proposals.[76] Gardiner, backed up by Willmott and Baxter, replied that the war situation had justified the coalition and that it was necessary for the party to have cabinet posts if it were to have sufficient influence on policy. Finally, at Monger's suggestion, the delegates resolved to sanction the coalition arrangement for the duration of the war, provided that the Association's election candidates stood as 'out and out Country Party men'.[77] This qualification, and Monger's obvious objections to the parliamentary party's show of independence, underlined the fact that as far as the F.S.A. was concerned, the Country Party's commitment to the National Party was provisional. In the subsequent election campaign, moreover, the F.S.A. kept itself apart

[73] *W.A.P.D.*, vol. 54, 1 Feb. 1917, pp. 1638, 1645-6; 7 Feb. 1917, p. 1674; *West Australian*, 7 Feb. 1917; W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1917, pp. 12-13.

[74] *West Australian*, 26 May, 19 June 1917.

[75] Ibid., 9, 22, 28 June 1917.

[76] W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1917, pp. 57-60.

[77] Ibid., pp. 11-14, 17.

from its ostensible allies, the National Federation Council, the Liberal League and the National Labor Party, despite the fact that it had agreed to exchange preferences with the Liberals in thirteen electorates.[78] The poll, held on 29 September 1917, resulted in a decisive victory for the National forces, who captured thirty-four seats to the Labor Party's sixteen (including one gained by an Independent Labor candidate).

While the Federal and State National Parties retained their patriotic aura, they had little difficulty in holding together their diverse supporting interests, but trouble began once it became clear that, with Hughes as Prime Minister, the Commonwealth government was developing economic policies which were radical and protectionist in character. The tariff issue had lost none of its explosive quality, especially in rural areas, and once it was evident that Hughes was contemplating a major increase in tariff levels, both free traders and revenue tariffists grew restless. There had been hints of this in 1917[79] but in March 1919 the Acting Prime Minister gave definite information about the government's intentions.[80] At once, the graziers' associations were up in arms, supported by the revenue-tariffist F.S.As. of Western and South Australia. In the eastern States, where protectionist sentiment persisted amongst dairy farmers, sugar growers and fruit farmers, the reaction was mixed; the Queensland Farmers' Union, at one extreme, was unabashedly protectionist[81] and both the New South Wales F.S.A. and the V.F.U. had vocal protectionist wings.[82]

The federal government's interest in increasing its economic authority also disturbed a great many of the important rural pressure groups, who had reason to resent the regulations introduced under the War Precautions Act (which remained in force until 31 July 1920) by which butter prices were fixed and the distribution of most essential commodities controlled. Years of accumulated grievances came to a head in mid-1918 when Walter Massy Greene, an Honorary Minister in charge of price controls, issued regulations under the Act fixing the price of meat sold in metropolitan markets, a step recommended by the Interstate Prices Commission to curb widespread profiteering amongst meat traders. Immediately a series of protest meetings was sparked off throughout the grazing districts of the eastern States and South Australia, culminating in a mass demonstration in Melbourne in June 1918, after which a stern delegation of graziers talked with the Acting

[78] H. J. Prater, 'Brief History of the Country Party of Western Australia', MS. held in the Farmers' Union office, Perth, dated 20 July 1953, p. 3.

[79] See statement by Hughes, *C.P.D.*, vol. 81, 22 Feb. 1917, p. 10574.

[80] *S.M.H.*, 22 Mar. 1919.

[81] See *Producers' Review*, 10 Jan. 1919, p. 12; 10 June 1919, p. 34.

[82] See the tariff debates at their 1919 conferences, *Farmers' Advocate*, 30 Oct. 1919; N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1919, pp. 84-8.

Prime Minister on the steps of Parliament House.[83] This kind of reaction helps to explain why all the principal graziers' and farmers' associations except the V.F.U. refused to support the government's Constitution Alteration Bills, intended to increase Commonwealth powers in the regulation of intra-state trade and commerce, trusts, combinations and monopolies, and industrial affairs, when these were submitted to referendum at the end of 1919.[84]

Graziers' free-trade and *laissez-faire* principles were so offended by what they took to be the authoritarian, radical and protectionist trend of the National Party's policies that many of them came to regard the country party movement as a means of conservative protest, as did dairy farmers, who objected to the fixing of butter prices and the winter butter pools. In fact, a broad distinction can be made between the motives which prompted the wheat farmers on the one hand and graziers and dairy farmers on the other to throw in their lot with the country parties; whereas the wheat farmers on the whole had a positive interest in country party action, namely to ensure growers' control of the wheat pools and their establishment as permanent marketing corporations, the graziers and dairy farmers had a negative interest, free-trade and anti-radical in the case of the former and anti-red tape in the case of the latter. The wheat farmers' boost to the country party movement had come in 1916 and 1917 but it was not until 1918 and 1919 that the impact of the graziers and dairy farmers was felt. Although as a general rule graziers' and pastoralists' associations chose to keep out of party politics, in Queensland and New South Wales they were drawn into the country party movement, with important results in both States.

In Queensland the United Graziers' Association (U.G.A.) was attracted to country party politics not only because of its concern with federal issues but also because the State Labor government was by 1919 planning legislation to improve rural labour conditions, to remove the 50 per cent limitation on increases in pastoral lease rentals, and to abolish the Legislative Council—a programme to which the U.G.A. strongly objected. It therefore decided to enter party politics to support, not the National Party, whose links with city business interests it disliked, but the country party venture of the Queensland Farmers' Union, and in January 1919 it joined with the Q.F.U. and the United Cane Growers' Association (U.C.G.A.) to form a Primary Producers' Union (P.P.U.).[85] This body was to co-operate with the electoral organizations of the National Party in the forthcoming Federal and

[83] *Argus*, 11, 20, 21 June 1918; *S.M.H.*, 22 Feb., 6 Mar., 31 May 1918.

[84] Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1901-1929*, pp. 170-1; Conrad Joyner, 'W. M. Hughes and the "Powers" Referendum of 1919: A Master Politician at Work', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, v, 1, May 1959, pp. 15-23; Joyner, *The Commonwealth and Monopolies, Sydney Studies in Politics: 4*.

[85] *Graziers' Review* (Brisbane), 14 Apr. 1921, pp. 30-1.

State elections, and the bulk of its income was to be supplied by the U.G.A.[86] The electoral self-sufficiency of the P.P.U. made possible the formation of a parliamentary country party, and one was established on 28 July 1920 by thirteen former members of the National Party.[87] Led by W. J. Vowles (Dalby), they increased the new party's strength to 21 in the State elections of 9 October 1920.

Unlike the U.G.A., which reflected the highly conservative interests of wealthy graziers, the New South Wales Graziers' Association (G.A.) was by 1919 becoming a small man's organization—and its politics were accordingly less conservative in tone. The G.A. was directly descended from the Pastoralists' Union, formed in 1890 for the purpose of combating the pastoral strike; in later years its main duties were to represent its members as an industrial employers' union in the Federal and State Arbitration Courts. During World War I it was joined by many small graziers and mixed (wheat and sheep) farmers from the New South Wales tablelands and slopes[88] and, in response to their attitudes, changed its procedures in certain important respects. The functions of its General Council were increased; district committees with wide powers were instituted; its name was changed from the Pastoralists' Union to the Graziers' Association in 1916, and in 1918 annual conferences replaced the previous closed annual meetings. In the closing years of the war, the Association reacted strongly to the general strike of 1917, to the Station Hands' Award of that year, and to the meat-price fixing regulations of 1918, all of which contributed to a sense of frustration amongst its membership. The delegates at its 1919 conference were mainly interested in working out ways of controlling members of Parliament who represented rural areas, and a country party appealed to them as the best possible means of doing so. The conference therefore appointed delegates to confer with the F.S.A. and other bodies about supporting candidates of 'a Producers' Party' and authorized a voluntary levy on members at the rate of £1 per thousand sheep (and the equivalent of cattle and horses) 'for the purpose of establishing a fund to protect the interests of graziers in all public matters, and to secure the return to Parliament of representatives pledged to support the interests of the producers'. The revenue thus acquired was paid into a Special Purposes Fund.[89]

[86] See the statement by William Kent, vice-president of the U.G.A., *Producers' Review* (Toowoomba), Nov. 1919, p. 71.

[87] Brisbane *Courier*, 29 July 1920.

[88] In the year 1918-19, the 1,252 new members enrolled owned 1,829,520 sheep between them or the low average of 1,461 sheep per member (*N.S.W. Graziers' Annual, 1919*, p. 35). Between 1914 and 1928 the average number of sheep per member dropped from 8,321 to 3,377 (ibid., *1929*, p. 60).

[89] *G.A. Conference Minutes*, 1919. See also pamphlet enclosed in Minutes, 'Graziers in Politics, Annual Conference Debate, How the Decisions were Made', Sydney, 1919.

The F.S.A., meanwhile, had become disillusioned about the National Party with which it had identified itself so closely in 1917. Trouble had arisen in 1918, when the F.S.A. leaders complained that they had not been consulted in advance about such important measures as the 1918 Arbitration Bill, which sought to vest in the State Arbitration Court the power to fix wages for workers in the agricultural and dairying industries amongst others. In the end this power was given not to the Court but to the Board of Trade, to which the Association's secretary (T. I. Campbell) was appointed; nevertheless the F.S.A. objected that it should have been obliged to bargain publicly for such a concession.[90] Delegates to the Association's 1918 conference wanted to break away from the National Party there and then but Walter Wearne and Trethowan persuaded them to give the alliance a further trial.[91] The Executive's great fear, despite the fact that New South Wales had had the second-ballot voting system since 1910, was that a rash of country party candidates would confuse the anti-Labor campaign in rural electorates and split the Nationalist vote. This misgiving was largely allayed in November 1918 when a Parliamentary Elections Amendment Act introduced a system of proportional representation, with five-member constituencies in city areas and three-member ones in the country, and in March 1919, after inconclusive discussions between the Premier and the F.S.A. president, the Association declared that it would run its own candidates at the following election.[92] In September the Association's conference decided that the F.S.A. would go forward 'as a straight-out political party at the next general elections' and instructed the Executive 'to invite the Executives of all other primary producers to unite in one political body known as the Country Party to secure representation in the next Parliament'.[93]

Once it became clear that the F.S.A. would break away from the National Association, the country members of the parliamentary National Party became restless. On 24 October 1918 twenty-one of them formed a Country Parliamentary Committee which throughout 1919 busied itself with a number of matters affecting rural interests, such as local government and forestry regulations, and was addressed by leading cabinet members at some of its meetings. It included Walter E. Wearne (Bingara), E. A. Buttenshaw (Lachlan) and Walter Bennett (Durham), all members of the F.S.A. who were later to join the parliamentary Progressive Party.[94]

[90] See B. D. Graham, 'Strategies of the Australian Country Parties, From their Origins to 1929', Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 1958, pp. 261-2.

[91] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1918, pp. 51-3.

[92] *S.M.H.*, 20, 21 Mar. 1919; N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1919, p. 15.

[93] Ibid., pp. 53-6.

[94] 'Report of Proceedings of Country Parliamentary Committee', [1920], pamphlet included amongst the W. E. Wearne Papers, Bingara.

All these tendencies pointed to the emergence of a purely country party rather than a revival of the more ambitious Progressive Party project of the 1915-16 period, especially in view of the fact that George Beeby appeared to have settled down happily as a member of the Holman cabinet; in October 1918, indeed, the F.S.A.'s Executive had invited him to resign 'from the political leadership' of the Progressive movement.[95] Beeby was then just on the point of leaving Australia for several months on a visit to America, but on his return in July 1919, instead of quitting the Progressive group, he resigned office. In addition, he made serious charges of corruption against the government; he alleged that the Minister of Agriculture had approved a large wheat-handling contract without proper authority; that the government had given John Brown, a wealthy Newcastle colliery owner, overgenerous compensation (£13,000) for damage to his mines by government labour during the 1917 strike; and that an excessive commission had been given to an engineering firm for advice on the construction of terminal wheat elevators.[96] As these charges were repeated and elaborated in the months following, Beeby acquired a considerable reputation as a man of principle, and he was able to gather around him several other disaffected Nationalists, such as T. J. Ley and T. R. Bavin. Once more Beeby was politically available and when, in October 1919, the earnest discussions about forming a third party began, he was able to persuade the country leaders to reconsider his Progressive Party idea.

On 14 October 1919 the Sydney newspapers announced that a Central Electoral Council, consisting of five members of the F.S.A., three of the G.A. and three of the Soldiers' and Citizens' Federation, had been formed to contest the next State election. The name 'country party' was not mentioned: instead it was announced:

> All candidates shall run only as candidates of the Progressive Party, and shall form a separate party during elections, and if elected shall form a separate party in Parliament, under a leader to be elected by the members of the Progressive Party prior to the first meeting of Parliament.[97]

The Council fought the federal election of 13 December 1919 and began its final preparations for the State elections. Then, in January 1920, Beeby, Bavin and Ley, along with Wearne and Buttenshaw of the Country Parliamentary Committee, left the National Party and began to call themselves Progressives.[98]

[95] Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, pp. 52-3.

[96] *S.M.H.*, 14 July 1919; *N.S.W.P.D.*, vol. 75, 20 Aug. 1919, pp. 101-16; Evatt, *Australian Labour Leader*, pp. 358-9.

[97] *S.M.H.*, 14 Oct. 1919. For the full details of this period see Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, pp. 54-6.

[98] *S.M.H.*, 16, 22, 29 Jan. 1920.

At this early stage, the agglomeration that was to become the New South Wales Country Party had an indeterminate character. Beeby, with his considerable parliamentary experience and widespread contacts, represented one form of power, and, at least in parliamentary politics, possibly the dominant one. Organizational power, however, rested with the F.S.A. (membership 7,000 and 326 branches) and the G.A. (5,173 members and 93 local committees)[99] but financial power undoubtedly lay with the G.A., whose Special Purposes Fund would clearly be the party's main material resource during the first few years of its existence. A great deal would now depend on whether the two outside associations were prepared to impose their own ideas of strategy and policy upon the parliamentary party or whether they would leave the parliamentarians to their own devices.

To come back now to Western Australia, we find that whereas in 1919 the country party forces in Queensland and New South Wales were dissociating themselves from the National Party, the Country Party in the West was finding itself more and more a prisoner in the alliance it had entered in 1917. This was made clear in the course of a prolonged ministerial crisis which lasted throughout April and May 1919 and which fundamentally altered the terms on which the original coalition had been based. On 8 April, when the Parliamentary National Party (to which the Country Party members belonged) met to elect replacements for two ministers (R. H. Underwood, National Labor, and James Gardiner, Country Party) who had just resigned, those present insisted that the Premier, H. B. Lefroy, should submit himself and his ministers for re-election also. This was done, and all were returned, J. T. Davies (National Labor) and A. E. Piesse (Country Party) being appointed to the cabinet vacancies. Shortly afterwards, however, it was revealed that Lefroy had been re-elected leader by one vote only, and he felt obliged to resign as Premier. On 15 April the party met again and chose Sir Hal Colebatch as its new leader, giving him a free hand to select his ministers. His cabinet, sworn in on the 17th, included as its Country Party representatives C. F. Baxter (Minister of Agriculture) and F. E. S. Willmott (Honorary Minister).[1] As a member of the Legislative Council, however, Colebatch was not legally entitled to act as Premier unless he had a seat in the Assembly, and though he tried to persuade a Country Party M.L.A. to resign in his favour, neither the F.S.A. Executive nor the parliamentary Country Party would sanction this arrangement.[2] Colebatch subsequently resigned on 15 May and Sir James Mitchell, elected by the National

[99] The F.S.A.'s membership has been estimated by dividing its revenue from membership fees for 1919 by its membership fee of 6s. per head (N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1920, p. 12). For the other figures, see ibid., 1919, p. 45; *N.S.W. Graziers' Annual, 1921*, pp. 8-9, 49.

[1] *West Australian*, 9-11, 16-18 Apr. 1919.

[2] W.A. F.S.A. Executive Minutes, 1918-19, 8 May 1919, pp. 64-5.

Party in his place, selected a new cabinet of eight members, including Baxter and Willmott as honorary ministers.[3] An additional Country Party minister, F. T. Broun, was appointed to the post of Colonial Secretary at the end of June.

The real importance of the 1919 reconstructions for the Country Party lay in the fact that, whereas in June 1917 the National Party had elected prospective ministers and specified the allocation of portfolios, on this occasion neither Colebatch nor Mitchell had consulted the parties before choosing ministers or distributing posts. They had acted as though the National Party were no longer an alliance of three but a single coherent party. Why had the Country Party accepted this position?

To some extent, its failure to obtain better coalition terms was a failure of strategy. As Dr Earle Page was to show in February 1923, a country party could enter a coalition and still retain its separate identity provided it ensured that the original agreement included adequate definition of the rights and privileges of each party concerned, but the agreement for the Western Australian coalition, vague and imprecise in 1917, was practically non-existent by 1919. During the formation of the Mitchell government the Country Party had neither chosen its ministers nor selected their portfolios and, although it continued to sit apart on the ministerial corner benches, it had virtually been reduced to the status of a faction of the National Party. Here another factor becomes of importance in explaining why the F.S.A. Executive had not tried to stir its parliamentary members into separate action; why in fact, it had decided on 20 February 1919 to recommend to the Association's next annual conference that the Country Party members might 'coalesce with any other party and take portfolios',[4] why it did not object publicly to the formation of either the Colebatch or Mitchell ministries and why, when the Association's conference met in August, it willingly endorsed the proposal that the Country Party should join coalitions.[5] This factor was the vital concern of the Westralian Farmers Ltd, the co-operative marketing company set up in conjunction with the F.S.A. in 1913, to preserve its hold on the handling business of the State Wheat Scheme. Under the terms of the original pool established in December 1915 it had been given one of several handling contracts but, under the Wheat Marketing Act 1918, it had received a complete monopoly of the scheme's entire handling business. When C. F. Baxter, who was Minister in charge of the Wheat Scheme from 1917 to 1920 (and a Country Party man), announced in 1918 that the company's contract would not be continued but that the handling agency would be submitted for private tender, he came under heavy fire from the

[3] *West Australian*, 16-19 May 1919.

[4] W.A. F.S.A. Executive Minutes, 1918-19, 19 and 20 Feb. 1919, p. 58.

[5] W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1919, p. 48.

F.S.A.'s journal, the *Primary Producer*.[6] Eventually, after some intensive lobbying,[7] the company's sole agency was renewed under the Wheat Marketing Act 1919; it was extended by subsequent Acts to 1922, when the pool was finally wound up. The importance to the F.S.A. of being able to exert pressure on the Minister concerned with the Wheat Scheme cannot be emphasized too strongly; John Sandford has suggested that the company might have failed had its handling monopoly not been preserved in 1918,[8] and, had it done so, it would have caused severe hardship to the wheat-belt farmers, many of whom were its shareholders and dependent on its services.

If the Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australian situations are compared, one fact stands out clearly—that the country party movements in those States were so much a part of the National Party complex that they could extricate themselves only with the greatest difficulty. By late 1919 an impressive degree of electoral independence had been achieved by country party interests in New South Wales and Queensland, but this was largely due to the impact of the organized graziers, whose contribution to the country party movement as a whole was essentially conservative. The electoral and parliamentary strategies of the country groups in these States were tentative and exploratory, lacking in boldness, and could successfully be contained by the National Parties. But in Victoria a different kind of country party had made its appearance, and the effects of its determined and adventurous policies were about to be felt.

Between 1917 and 1920 the V.F.U.'s branch strength increased from 370 to 547 and its membership from 8,000 to 15,000,[9] an expansion which made it twice as strong as the New South Wales F.S.A. In part, this reflected the fact that the Union was attracting more support from small graziers and dairy farmers of the Goulburn Valley and Gippsland regions than it had done previously, with the result that its radical temper, most pronounced when it had been simply a wheatgrowers' organization, was being toned down. However, the early radical leadership was firmly in control of its Central Council and was determined to stop at nothing to build up independent country parties in both the State and Federal Parliaments. It had even considered contesting the federal election of 5 May 1917, but found that branch delegates refused to endorse proposals for nominating country party candidates to the Wimmera, Echuca and Indi seats, mainly through fear of split-

[6] See for example *Primary Producer*, 17 May 1918. See also W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1918, pp. 12-15, 26-34, 37-43.

[7] *West Australian*, 28 Nov. 1918. See also 'Interim Report of the Royal Commission on the Wheat Marketing Scheme', Pap. No. 4, *W.A.P.P.* 1918, vol. 1.

[8] John Sandford, *Walter Harper and the Farmers*, p. 41.

[9] *V.F.U. Annual Reports*, 1917 and 1920.

ting the Nationalist vote.[10] State elections, however, were conducted under a preferential voting system introduced in 1911 and the Council had no difficulty in persuading branches to select candidates for the Victorian poll of 15 November 1917. In this contest, the V.F.U. made an alliance with the 'Economy Party' (a rural faction of the National Party which John Bowser had formed in December 1916 to agitate for lower rail fares and retrenchment in public expenditure),[11] the two organizations agreeing to co-operate in the election campaign in the interests of 'a cohesive, constructive and continuous country party' and against Sir Alexander Peacock's National government.[12] The election resulted in the return of 40 Nationalists (of whom about 27 belonged to the Economy faction), 18 Labor, 3 National-Labor and 4 V.F.U. members to an Assembly of 65, the V.F.U.'s candidates having won 36·67 per cent of the valid votes in the eleven seats they contested. Delighted at the result, Isaac Hart declared that the V.F.U. men elected were not politicians but 'apostles of a great cause', disciples 'of a great movement . . . consecrated to the cause of the man on the land'.[13]

After the elections Sir Alexander Peacock resigned from office and John Bowser became the next Premier; he formed a cabinet drawn from his Economy faction and received assurances of support from the V.F.U. members.[14] On 13 March 1918, however, the Bowser Ministry was unexpectedly defeated in the Assembly on a vital railway-estimates issue. H. S. W. Lawson, a leading member of the Peacock faction, now became Premier and won the support of the Economy faction by retaining seven of its former ministers in his cabinet.[15] Three of the V.F.U. members (John Allan, Isaac Weaver and D. H. Gibson) thereupon moved their seats from the back-ministerial to the ministerial-corner benches while the fourth member, Percy Stewart, moved further afield to the opposition corner, where he sat next to the Labor Party.[16] This split in the young party signified more than a preference for softer cushions and we shall return to its significance in the next chapter; but here the main point to emphasize is that Allan and his two companions, although they attended meetings of the National Party, remained faithful to the V.F.U.

Having achieved this moderate success in State politics, the V.F.U. began a campaign to persuade the federal National government to introduce preferential voting in elections to the House of Representatives

[10] *Farmers' Advocate*, 23, 30 Mar., 6 Apr. 1917; *Argus*, 31 Mar. 1917.

[11] *Argus*, 7-8 Dec. 1916.

[12] *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 1, 26 June 1917, pp. 51-8.

[13] *Farmers' Advocate*, 23 Nov. 1917. J. J. Hall, who was returned for Kara Kara as a V.F.U. man, later lost the seat on a recount of the votes.

[14] *Argus*, 28 Nov. 1917.

[15] Ibid., 14-18 Mar. 1918. See also *Age*, 18 Oct. 1920.

[16] *Argus*, 22 Mar. 1918.

and proportional representation in elections to the Senate, without which the fear of vote-splitting would continue to inhibit farmers' organizations from running their own candidates. On 22 January 1918, J. J. Hall, the V.F.U.'s General Secretary, wrote asking the Prime Minister that these voting systems be introduced.

> I would also take the liberty of pointing out that without this reform your party will be in serious jeopardy at the next election. It was with difficulty that organisations such as ours were restrained from running candidates at the last Federal election, when, with three candidates in the field your cause would inevitably have suffered with the split vote. We cannot guarantee, and are not likely to give further immunity; in fact, our Organisation at the last Federal election decided to run candidates in all future elections.[17]

Hughes received similar warnings from the Western Australian F.S.A.[18] and from the A.F.F.O., which held its third conference in March 1918,[19] but he left for England without having taken any action. Consequently, when the resignation of Sir William Irvine from the House of Representatives occasioned a by-election for the Victorian rural seat of Flinders, based on the West Gippsland district, the V.F.U. decided to take a tough line. Despite the fact that strong Labor and Nationalist nominees were already in the field, the Union nominated Hall himself as its candidate and waited for reactions. The Nationalists were very concerned about this complication because their candidate, Captain S. M. Bruce, was regarded as an outstanding recruit for their party. The Acting Prime Minister, W. A. Watt, tried to persuade Hall to withdraw his nomination by making a personal offer to introduce a preferential voting bill at the next parliamentary session, but the Union withdrew Hall only when it received, two days before the poll, a guarantee from the National Party as a whole that Watt's undertaking would be honoured.[20] In the event, Bruce won the contest by 14,445 votes to the Labor candidate's 7,740. Hall's name remained on the ballot-paper but he drew only 382 votes.

The urgency of the matter was again impressed on the government in September and October, when a by-election was held for the Western Australian seat of Swan, following the death of Lord Forrest of Bunbury. This time it was the Western Australian F.S.A. which insisted on nominating a candidate, thereby complicating the task of the lone Nationalist, who was already contending with an Independent and a strong Labor nominee, E. W. Corboy. When the poll was held on 26 October, Corboy won with only 34·36 per cent of the votes, while his three rivals split the remainder between them, the F.S.A. man polling 31·39 per cent, the Nationalist 29·61 per cent and the Independent

[17] *Farmers' Advocate*, 1 Feb. 1918.

[18] *Primary Producer*, 18 Oct. 1918.

[19] See U. R. Ellis in the *Countryman* (Syd.), Nov. 1954.

[20] *Argus*, 9, 11 May 1918

4·64 per cent. While Labor's cheap victory was being lamented by the conservative press, the year's third federal by-election, for the Victorian seat of Corangamite, appeared about to follow the same pattern; again it seemed likely that a non-Labor majority would be hopelessly split between two or three candidates—a Nationalist, an Independent Nationalist, a Returned Soldier Nationalist and a representative of the V.F.U.

This prospect certainly affected the government's attitude towards its Electoral Bill which, having been introduced on 3 October, had moved slowly through its early stages. However, after the announcement of the Swan result and the Corangamite nominations, the Nationalists made certain that the measure would be passed by both chambers in time for it to apply to the Corangamite by-election. Those of the Bill's provisions governing preferential and postal voting were specially proclaimed[21] before the proclamation of the whole Act and were applied to the Corangamite poll, which was held on 14 December 1918. James Scullin (Labor) obtained the highest total of primary votes but his V.F.U. opponent, W. G. Gibson, attracted most of the Nationalist preferences and was able to defeat him on the final count by 14,096 votes to 10,944. Gibson thus became the first Country Party member of the federal Parliament.

One of the Country Party's most cherished myths is that, by virtue of the 'Flinders deal', it was responsible for the introduction of preferential voting in federal elections.[22] This claim ignores the fact that the system had already gained acceptance in Victoria and Western Australia and that it had been seriously considered for federal elections for several years; it had almost been instituted by the Commonwealth Electoral Bill of 1902 until it was amended in its final stages, and had certainly been accepted by Sir Joseph Cook, the leader of the pre-war Liberal Party, as well as by Hughes himself.[23] The 1918 Electoral Bill, it should be noted, had already reached an advanced drafting stage before the Flinders poll and Patrick Glynn, the minister in charge of it, later pointed out that he could have brought forward a preferential voting bill early in 1918 had it not been necessary also to alter these

[21] The Bill was assented to on 21 Nov. 1918 and the proclaimed dates for its commencement were 25 Nov. 1918 for those provisions relating to preferential and postal voting (*Commonwealth of Australia, Gazette*, 1918, p. 2257), 21 Mar. 1919 for the bulk of the Act (ibid., 1919, p. 401), and 14 Dec. 1920 for section 32 (ibid., 1920, p. 2277).

[22] See J. P. Abbott, 'Contemporary Party Policies: The Country Party,' in A. Campbell Garnett (ed.), *Freedom and Planning in Australia*, p. 297; Sir Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon, The Inside Story of Forty Years of Australian Political Life*, pp. 51-2. For a secular version see Alan Reid, 'The Country Party Today', *Bulletin* (Sydney), 18 Aug. 1962, p. 16.

[23] On this question see Graham, 'The Choice of Voting Methods in Federal Politics, 1902-1918', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, VIII, 2, Nov. 1962, pp. 164-72.

sections of the Electoral Act dealing with postal voting procedures.[24] The Hughes government had a serious interest in providing preferential voting, an interest which must surely have antedated the V.F.U.'s move at Flinders, namely, that the National Party, so new and so heterogeneous, could not possibly match the Federal Labor Party in terms of organizational discipline and therefore needed an alternative voting system to permit its dissident elements to nominate candidates without splitting the anti-Labor vote. When all this is said, however, it was almost certainly the case that the V.F.U. and the Western Australian F.S.A., by their bustling tactics in the 1918 by-elections, forced the Nationalists to introduce preferential voting much earlier than might otherwise have been the case.

Preferential voting helped the Country Party in elections not only by calming conservative voters' fears about vote-splitting, but also by establishing a voting situation in which Country Party candidates, provided they were identified as men of the centre, would have a great advantage over their National and Labor opponents. From the outset, indeed, both National and Labor voters chose to treat the Country Party as if it were a centre party and allocated it their second preferences; this meant that if a Country Party candidate could survive the first count in a triangular contest with Labor and National rivals (assuming no one had obtained an absolute majority) he could be assured of obtaining about nine-tenths of the excluded candidate's preferences and stood a chance of winning the seat, even from a primary vote in the 28-32 per cent range. Thus in the 1919 federal election the V.F.U. won Corangamite with a primary vote of 31·42 per cent and 96·12 per cent of the excluded Labor candidate's preferences and held the seat in 1922 with a primary vote of 28·52 per cent and a preference allocation of 94·20 per cent from a defeated Nationalist. Contrast the position of a Nationalist candidate, assured only of Country Party preferences, and that of a Labor candidate, with little assurance of preferences from either National or Country Party nominees; in fact, unless a Labor candidate obtained a primary vote of 45 per cent or more in a three-way contest, he stood little chance of being elected on preferences.[25] The farm groups themselves must have been delighted at this situation, which they may not have anticipated. It would not be true, however, to assert that without preferential voting the Country Party would not have established an electoral basis; even had first-past-the-post voting been retained, farmers' candidates would still have been put forward in 1919 and they could well have won such seats as Wimmera and Echuca in Victoria, Riverina in New South Wales, and Swan and Dampier in Western Australia. In the event, however, the

[24] *C.P.D.*, vol. 87, 20 Nov. 1918, p. 8139.

[25] For a discussion of this subject, and for a table showing the preference patterns in the 1919 and 1922 elections, see Graham, op. cit., pp. 175-8 and 181 (Table II).

operation of preferential voting allowed the party to make a decisive rather than a partial electoral breakthrough.

With the exception of the V.F.U., the country party organizations were not really prepared for the campaign which preceded the federal election of 13 December 1919. They did, it is true, have a federal programme which the A.F.F.O. had prepared; its four constituent bodies (the V.F.U. and the F.S.As. of New South Wales, Western and South Australia) had discussed policy matters at their interstate meetings of April 1917, March 1918 and January 1919, the final version being adopted at a further meeting in August 1919. The programme stressed the need to reduce or abolish duties on goods imported for the primary industries, such as corn sacks and wool packs; to prevent government regulation of commerce and prices except with regard to the operations of trusts, combines and trade rings; to provide producers with representation on all boards and commissions dealing with their interests; to reform taxation and to encourage 'all forms of co-operative enterprises'.[26] Subsequently, each of the affiliated organizations produced its own manifesto based on the A.F.F.O.'s platform.

When the campaign is compared with those which preceded the pre-war polls of 31 May 1913 and 5 September 1914, the most striking difference to emerge in the rural areas is the energy and determination displayed by the V.F.U. It had already built up a small group in the House of Representatives, consisting of W. G. Gibson (returned at the Corangamite by-election in December 1918), W. C. Hill (the V.F.U. president, who had won the Echuca by-election in September 1919) and Edmund Jowett (the member for Grampians, who in September 1919 had aligned himself with the V.F.U.).[27] Of these Gibson and Jowett had attended meetings of the National Parliamentary Party but Hill had refused to do so.[28] The V.F.U. not only ensured that all three retained their seats but also returned Thomas Paterson for Indi and Percy Stewart for Wimmera. This was the V.F.U.'s contingent of five members which was to form the solid core of the Federal Country Party.

In the other States the situation was much less clear-cut, because many rural members were returned with the backing of both Nationalist and farmers' organizations. In Western Australia, J. H. Prowse won Swan as a direct representative of the F.S.A. but Harry Gregory, who retained Dampier, was endorsed by the Liberal League as well as the F.S.A.[29] In New South Wales the Central Electoral Committee, formed by the F.S.A. and the G.A. in October 1919, was taken unawares by the federal campaign and the initiative for choosing and

[26] *Land*, 27 Apr. 1917; 22 Mar. 1918; *Argus*, 25 Jan., 22 Aug. 1919. See also Ellis, *History of the Australian Country Party*, pp. 38-40.

[27] *Farmers' Advocate*, 4 Sept. 1919.

[28] *Argus*, 29 Sept. 1919; *Farmers' Advocate*, 2 Oct. 1919.

[29] *West Australian*, 13, 18 Nov. 1919.

backing candidates devolved to the local units of the two associations; of the successful candidates, J. M. Chanter (Riverina), Alexander Hay (New England) and W. M. Fleming (Robertson) had been jointly endorsed by the F.S.A. and the National Association while Dr Earle Page (Cowper) had accepted the F.S.A.'s endorsement after having come forward as an Independent.[30] The F.S.A. branches in Hume ran C. W. T. Milthorpe as an independent farmers' candidate,[31] but he obtained only 23·75 per cent of the votes. In South Australia, the F.S.A. belonged to a United Federal Campaign Committee, along with the Liberal Union and the National Association, and restricted itself to endorsing a country party candidate for Wakefield; however, both he and an independent farmers' candidate (A. D. Williams), nominated in Barker by the F.S.A.'s Mallee branches, were defeated.[32] The Queensland non-Labor campaign was run by a Federal Election Campaign Committee, on which the P.P.U. was represented; disliking this connection with the Nationalists, the Q.F.U. branches in Wide Bay tried to bring out J. A. Austin as their candidate but he withdrew when the P.P.U. refused to endorse him.[33] Arnold Wienholt, elected to Moreton as a Nationalist, had been endorsed by almost every organization of substance, including the P.P.U., but he had refused to sign its pledge or to be 'tied by any hard and fast rules'.[34] In Tasmania the Farmers, Stockowners and Orchardists' Association (T.F.S.O.A.) had endorsed the National Party's Senate team and most of its candidates for the House, but it had put forward its own nominee for the Wilmot seat. The latter was defeated, but because of its blanket policy with endorsements the Association was still able to claim a part-share in the election of W. J. McWilliams (Franklin), G. J. Bell (Darwin), and L. Atkinson (Wilmot).[35]

The farmers' organizations also figured in the Senate elections in Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, but they stood no chance in view of the system of block-voting introduced for Senate

[30] *S.M.H.*, 12 Nov. 1919 (Chanter); *Daily Observer* (Tamworth), 15 Nov. 1919 (Hay); *S.M.H.*, 11 Nov. 1919 (Fleming). In his autobiography (*Truant Surgeon*, p. 48), Page says he was endorsed by the A.F.F.O., but this body had little to do with the endorsing of candidates; he presumably meant the F.S.A., which was the organization he mentioned to the writer in an interview at Canberra (7 Mar. 1956).

H. R. M. Piggott (Calare) was also endorsed by both the F.S.A. and the National Association (*S.M.H.*, 5 Dec. 1919) but he was defeated.

[31] *S.M.H.*, 30 Oct. 1919.

[32] *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin*, Dec. 1919, pp. 503-15; *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 10-13 Dec. 1919.

[33] *Producers' Review*, Nov. 1919, pp. 10, 69-70; Brisbane *Courier*, 10 Nov. 1919

[34] *Producers' Review*, 10 May 1919, p. 70; 10 June 1919, p. 68; Brisbane *Courier*, 12 June, 11 Nov. 1919.

[35] Hobart *Mercury*, 31 Oct. 1919.

elections by the Electoral Act Amendment Act of 1919. In South Australia, a hint of a future device was given by the election of R. V. Wilson as the F.S.A.'s representative in a composite National Party team.[36]

The seventy-five members elected at the poll had fought the campaign under the following labels: on the government side were thirty straight-out Nationalists, eight members ('Farmer-Nationals') who had been endorsed by National Party and/or farmers' organizations, three Liberals from South Australia, and one Independent Nationalist; on the left was the Labor Party, with twenty-six members (including M. P. Considine of Barrier, New South Wales); and in between was the core of the Country Party, consisting of five V.F.U. men and two representatives of the Western Australian F.S.A. However, between the election and the meeting of Parliament certain changes took place: one Labor member became an Independent and the eight 'Farmer-Nationals' chose sides, four opting for the National and four for the Country Party. This left the firm party position as thirty-four Nationalists, three Liberals, two Independents, eleven Country Party, and twenty-five Labor members.[37]

For all its confusion, this election saw the first important electoral breakthrough for the country party movement; after some minor successes (Western Australia in 1914, Victoria in 1917), it had at last demonstrated the extent of its support. Then, in quick succession, the party did well in two important State elections: in the New South Wales poll of 20 March 1920, held under the proportional representation system, the Progressives won 15 seats in a House of 90; and in the Victorian election of 21 October 1920 the V.F.U. increased its following from 7 to 13 in a House of 65.[38]

[36] *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin*, Nov. 1919, p. 496.

[37] Ellis (*History of the Australian Country Party*, pp. 50-1) gives a detailed account of the sorting-out process but his figures for government and Labor strength are not correct; neither are those given by Sawer, *Federal Politics and Law, 1901-1929*, pp. 185-6.

Fleming, Atkinson, Bell and Chanter joined the National Party (see Fleming's statement, *C.P.D.*, vol. 91, 10 Mar. 1920, p. 276); McWilliams and Gregory had joined the Country Party before 5 Jan. 1920, when they signed a circular convening its first meeting (see Ellis, p. 50); Page and Hay attended the party meeting on 22 Jan. (ibid., p. 51); and Wienholt joined on 24 Feb. (*Argus*, 25 Feb. 1920).

W. G. Higgs, elected as the Labor member for Capricornia, was expelled from his party in January 1920 for suggesting a parliamentary alliance with the Country Party (see ibid., 5, 22 Jan. 1920); he supported the government as an Independent and joined the National Party in Sept. 1920 (see ibid., 17 Sept. 1920).

[38] The original V.F.U. Party of four had been joined by Alfred Downward (Mornington) in July 1919 (*Farmers' Advocate*, 17 July 1919) and by John

(Continued on facing page)

The Formation of the Country Parties

By the time the Country Parties were being formed, the dominance of the cities in Australian society was a well-established fact. The Commonwealth Census of 4 April 1921 showed that 62·33 per cent of the total population of 5,435,734 lived in towns and cities, and that the number of urban dwellers was still increasing at a faster rate than the number of rural dwellers. Moreover, only about one-third of the urban population lived in towns outside the main cities, whose share of the total population, having remained stable for the previous three decades, had increased sharply between 1911 and 1921.

Percentage of the Australian Population recorded in Metropolitan Areas[39]

1881	*1891*	*1901*	*1911*	*1921*
32·00	37·10	36·78	38·03	43·06

The changing rural-urban balance of the population had been accompanied by a shift in the relative importance of the different classes of occupation, to an extent illustrated in the following table.

Occupational Categories as Percentages of Total Number of Breadwinners[40]

	1871	*1881*	*1891*	*1901*	*1911*	*1921*
Professional	5·1	5·5	6·2	6·8	7·3	8·7
Domestic	11·6	12·2	11·6	12·3	10·3	9·1
Commercial	8·1	9·2	12·3	13·6	14·6	15·3
Transport and Communication	3·8	4·5	6·8	7·4	8·0	9·0
Industrial	26·5	29·4	30·7	26·0	28·7	31·2
Primary	44·0	38·2	30·7	32·5	29·9	25·8
Independent	0·9	1·0	1·7	1·4	1·2	0·9

Although the trend had not been firmly indicated by the previous censuses, it now became clear that the Industrial category (people occupied in secondary industries and construction work) would in future outweigh the Primary category (people engaged in the agricultural, pastoral, mining, and other primary industries), at least in occupational terms. 'The decade 1911-1921', noted the Census Commissioners,

> marks the period in the development of Australia, during which the persons engaged in manufacturing and other secondary processes became more numerous than those engaged in primary production. In 1911 the Industrial Class [i.e. the occupational category, 'Industrial']

Bowser (Wangaratta) and John Carlisle (Benalla) in June 1920 (*Argus*, 7 June 1920). When Stewart resigned from the Assembly in October 1919 to stand for the federal election, another Country Party man, Frank E. Old, was elected to his vacant seat (Swan Hill).

[39] *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1921, p. 40.

[40] Ibid., p. 39.

already had first place in New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia, but in the other States the predominance of the Primary Class was such, that for Australia as a whole, the Primary Class was the greater. By 1921 the preponderance of the Industrial Class in New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia had increased to such an extent, and at the same time the excess in favour of the primary industries, though still existing in Queensland, Western Australia, and Tasmania had so diminished, that the number of persons engaged in Industrial Occupations throughout Australia exceeded those in the Primary Group by about 21·0 per cent.[41]

Occupations of Primary Producers as Shown in 1921 Census[42]

	N.S.W.	*Vic.*	*Qld.*	*S.A.*	*W.A.*	*Tas.*	*N.T.*	*F.C.T.*	*Australia Total*
Engaged in Agricultural Pursuits	94,507	103,116	50,532	41,269	26,564	21,334	82	90	337,494
„ Pastoral Pursuits	65,570	22,679	39,872	6,389	4,883	1,858	703	190	142,094
„ Capture, &c., of Wild Animals and their Produce	1,701	944	541	282	137	331	3	8	3,947
„ Fisheries	2,190	1,059	1,535	590	2,051	196	62	20	7,703
„ Forestry	7,724	8,153	5,262	747	5,657	2,724	10	3	30,280
„ Water Conservation and Supply	4,101	2,808	1,554	1,219	693	26	8	2	10,411
„ Mining and Quarrying	32,917	8,679	10,253	2,088	9,044	3,394	389	2	66,766
Total	208,710	147,438	109,549	52,584	48,979	29,863	1,257	315	598,695

The Country Parties' clientèle was to be drawn mainly from the first two groups in the table, particularly wheat and fruit farmers from the first and dairy farmers and small graziers from the second. It is important to note, however, that both the agricultural and pastoral totals almost certainly include rural labourers, sharefarmers, and people servicing the primary industries, and that the number of landholders was probably not more than 150,000 in both groups combined.

There was a great deal of common ground between the wheat and pastoral industries. Geographically contiguous for the most part, they merged into each other in the regions on the tablelands and western slopes of the Great Dividing Range of eastern Australia. This was one of the reasons that the Royal Commission which inquired into the wheat, bread, and flour industries in the early thirties had to go to such lengths to decide which farmers should be classed as wheatgrowers. In dealing with the 1932-3 season, it concluded that the total of wheatgrowers in Australia was about 42,000 after excluding 20,000 holdings which grew less than 100 acres of wheat, or derived larger incomes from sources other than wheat, or were worked by sharefarmers. Its detailed estimates were as follows:[43]

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., p. 1211.

[43] 'Royal Commission on the Wheat, Flour and Bread Industries', Second Report, p. 95, *C.P.P., 1933-34*.

	No. of Wheat holdings	*No. of Wheat growers*
N.S.W.	17,892	11,002
Vic.	18,303	11,238
S.A.	14,248	10,800
W.A.	9,804	8,267
Qld.	1,927	500
Totals	62,174	41,807

The importance of mixed farming for the pastoral industry, on the other hand, is suggested by the following figures, supplied by the Commonwealth Statistician to Sir John Higgins in 1925.

Sheep Flocks in Australia, 1922-1923[44]

*Size of flocks**	*Number of flocks*	*Percentage of total flocks*	*Percentage of total sheep*
Less than 1,000 sheep	63,226	80·63	20·41
1,000 and less than 10,000	13,883	17·71	44·16
10,000 and more	1,306	1·66	35·39
Travelling flocks	—	—	·04
Total	78,415	100·00	100·00

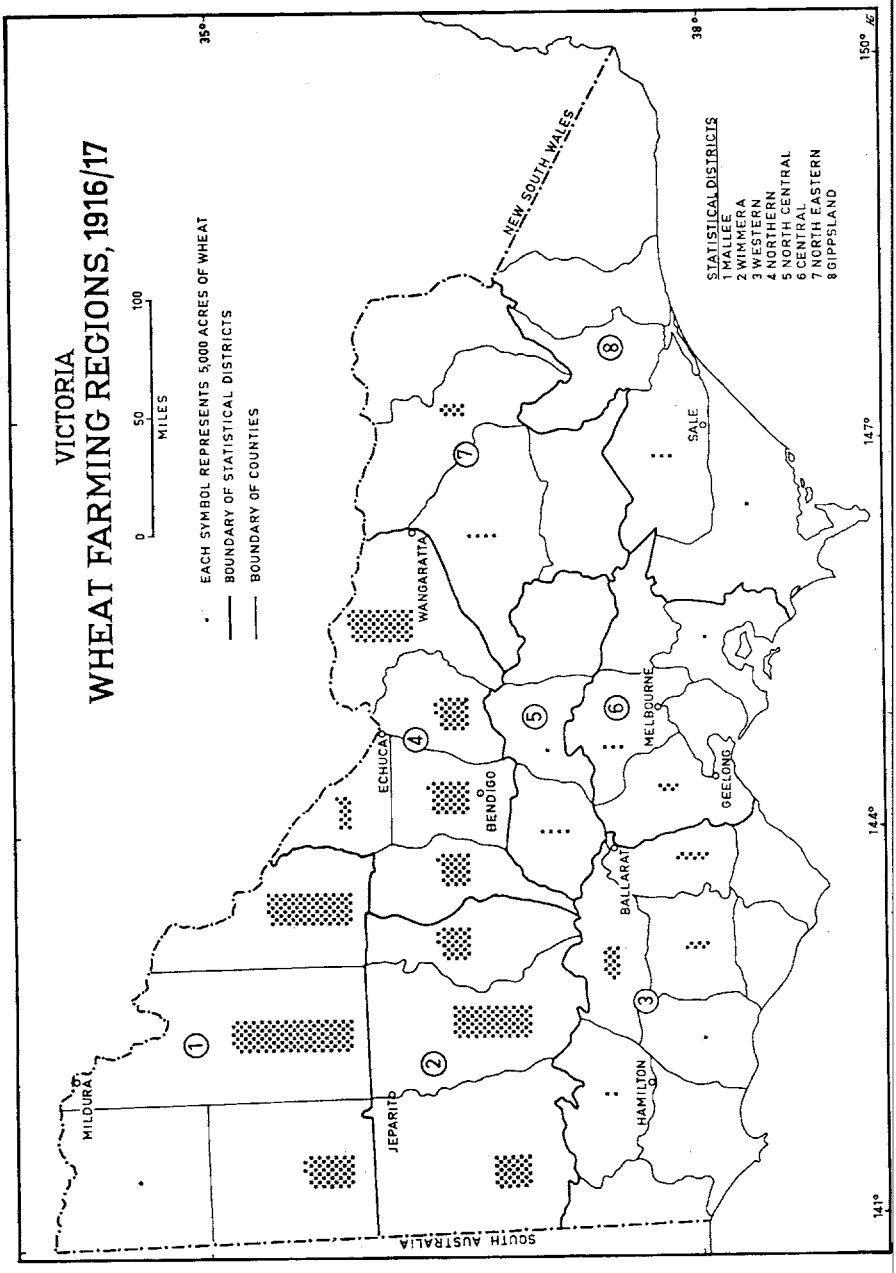
* The number of sheep in travelling flocks was estimated at 33,000.

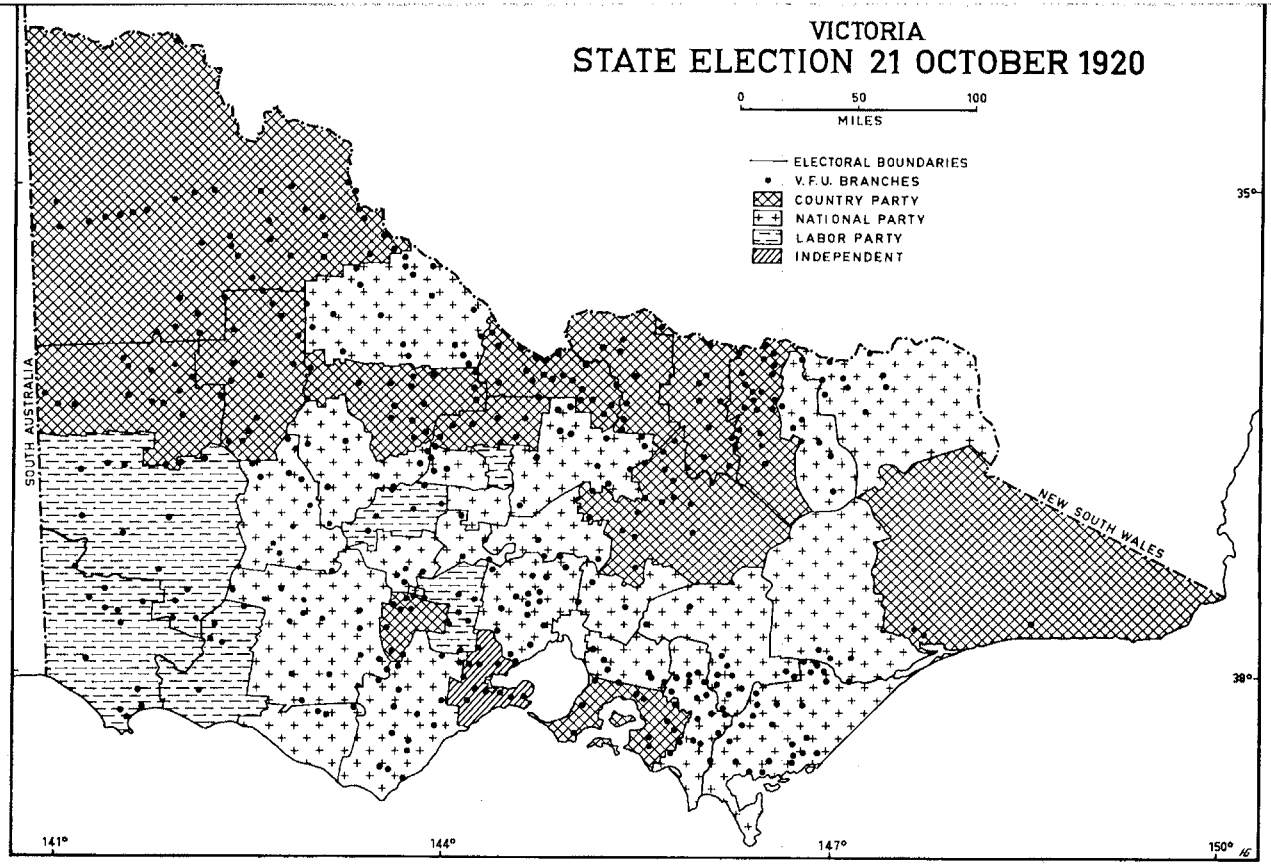
That there were rather more small flocks during World War I is indicated by the fact that in 1921 the British Australian Wool Realisation Association made cash payments to fully 52,832 growers who had supplied wool to the value of £100 or less to the Central Wool Committee, and that Priority Wool Certificates and Shares were issued to another 69,849 people, who had supplied wool valued at more than £100 (although the latter total included a number of large land and station companies).[45]

Coinciding generally with the wheat and mixed farming regions, the areas of Country Party strength in eastern Australia formed an irregular crescent which began in the Darling Downs of Queensland, arched southwards through the New South Wales Tablelands and the Riverina to Victoria's northern wheat districts, its southern tip ending in the South Australian Mallee. Other pockets of support were located in dairying regions of Gippsland and the northern coast of New South Wales, and in the wheat-belt of Western Australia. It had

[44] 'Address delivered by Sir John Higgins, K.C.M.G., at a Conference of Woolgrowers held in Melbourne on 23rd June, 1925', Melbourne, [1925], p. 65 and Appendix A.

[45] 'Report of the Fourth Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders in British Australian Wool Realisation Association Limited and of an Extraordinary General Meeting held on 7th May, 1925', Melbourne, [1925], Appendix C, Tables A and B.


VICTORIA
WHEAT FARMING REGIONS, 1916/17
0 50 100
MILES
EACH SYMBOL REPRESENTS 5,000 ACRES OF WHEAT
BOUNDARY OF STATISTICAL DISTRICTS
BOUNDARY OF COUNTIES
STATISTICAL DISTRICTS
1 MALLEE
2 WIMMERA
3 WESTERN
4 NORTHERN
5 NORTH CENTRAL
6 CENTRAL
7 NORTH EASTERN
8 GIPPSLAND
NEW SOUTH WALES
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
MILDURA
JEPARIT
HAMILTON
BALLARAT
BENDIGO
ECHUCA
WANGARATTA
MELBOURNE
GEELONG
SALE
35°
38°
141°
144°
147°
150°



3 State Election, Victoria, 21 October 1920

not taken root in the sheep and cattle regions of the inland, or in the long-established, traditionally conservative farming districts such as the Hunter Valley and the South Coast of New South Wales, the area to the north and east of Melbourne, and the old farming country around Adelaide and Perth.

The regional character of the early country party movement indicated the limits to its expansion as well as the sources of its strength, a point which may be illustrated by bringing the two State elections of 1920 into sharper focus. If the maps on pages 136-7 are compared it can be seen that the Victorian Country Party, when it first appeared, was based squarely on the northern wheat and irrigation districts and the mixed farming areas of the Goulburn Valley; here the V.F.U.'s branches were well established, and here it had won every Assembly seat with the exception of Gunbower. It had also built up its branch strength in Gippsland, in the east, and had already won two seats in what was to become its second most important region in subsequent elections. In the Western District, however, its isolated and narrow victory in Grenville (which it won with 53 per cent of the votes) was a reliable indicator of how poor its prospects were in this part of the State. By no means did the country party movement dominate the rural electorate, and despite the V.F.U.'s claim that both the National and Labor Parties were Melbourne oriented, both these had secure bases as rural parties. The Nationalists, like the free traders of pre-fusion times, were entrenched in the established dairying and grazing lands which had been settled in the mid-nineteenth century, before the expansion of closer settlement into the northern districts and the Wimmera. In these established areas the links between city and country had always been close; rural society here was more integrated, more hierarchical and more secure than in the newer lands; the country towns were more prosperous and farming a more profitable business. In the elections of the twenties, the Nationalists were to give ground in this area, but to Labor, not to the Country Party. Labor was also moving out into rural Victoria, where its two main assets were the Australian Workers' Union (strongest in the Western District amongst the pastoral workers) and the Australian Railways Union; it already held the traditional Labor seats in and around the old mining towns of Ballarat and Bendigo, with their factories and large railway yards, and could now begin consolidating its hold on some of the western seats. From its inception, therefore, the Victorian Farmers' Union was denied living space; but this, paradoxically, became one of its advantages, for it caused it to organize its support much more systematically than a larger, more confident party might have done.

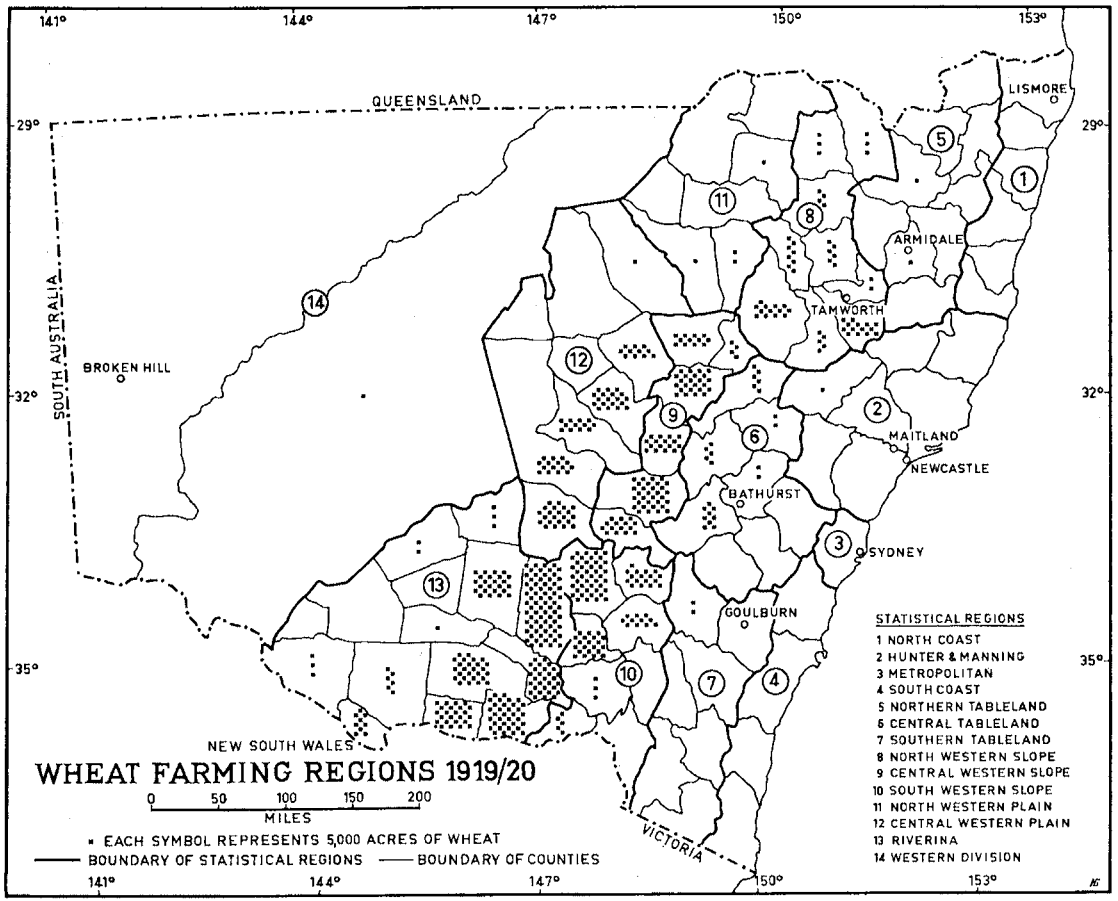
The maps illustrating the position in New South Wales are not as useful as those for Victoria, because the large electorates used in New South Wales under proportional representation and the wide spread of the Progressive Party mask the real centres of country party strength. As we shall see, these centres were located in two regions, New England

(represented here by the electorates of Northern Tableland, Byron and Oxley) and the Central West (enclosed by Murray, Murrumbidgee, Cootamundra and Wammerawa). In the New England region, the country party movement was linked with the strong separatist traditions which had already produced the New State agitation, whereas in the Central West it expressed much more the economic concerns of wheatgrowers and graziers. The overlapping areas of the F.S.A. and G.A. branch distribution mark those regions where the early country party was based on organized local support, as distinct from those where its standing reflected the ability of dissident Nationalists to command a large personal support.

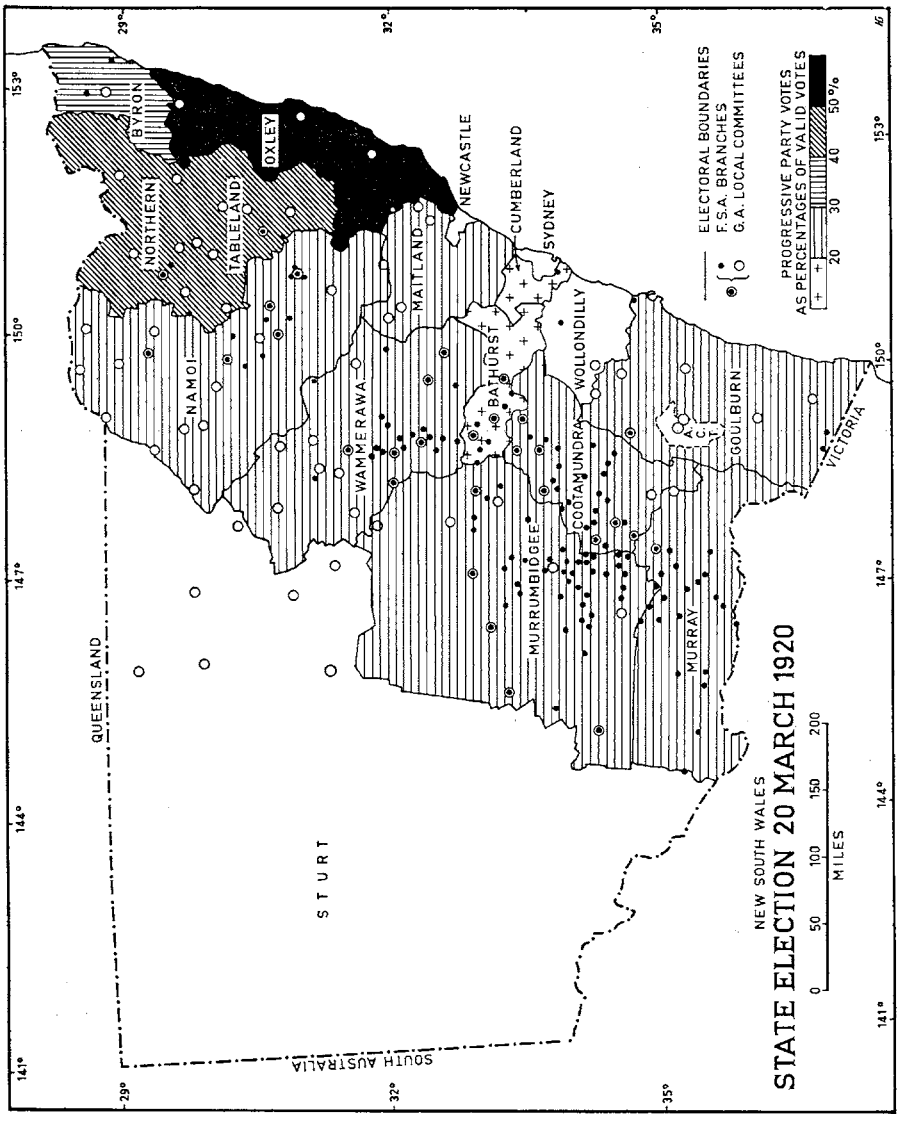
From the vantage point of 1920, by which time country parties were established in every State except Tasmania, it is possible to sum up the factors which produced the country party movement and those which led to its electoral breakthrough. In general terms, it represented the two great protests of agrarian Australia—that against denial of status, and that against economic insecurity. The agrarian traditions which flowed into the country parties were not confident and expansive; rather they embodied a cultural reaction to the dominance of the big coastal cities on the one hand and the pastoralist establishment on the other. The myth that the city had exploited the country which one encounters so frequently in country party literature points to one of the party's greatest sources of strength, the 'country-mindedness' which made its supporters feel that they would have no place in a world dominated by city parties, whether radical or conservative.

Seen in another light, however, the country parties were the latest in a series of political experiments dating back to the land leagues and land reform associations of an earlier era. The wheatgrowers were the group most interested in these experiments because the insecurity of their industry forced them to think in political terms much more seriously than did other sections, such as the dairy farmers. When the wartime wheat pool burst upon their lives, the wheatmen reacted by placing new demands on their pressure groups, insisting that the State had now become so pervasive that the farmer had no alternative but to organize parties in Parliament. To the wheatgrowers' efforts in this direction were later added those of the dairy farmers, who disliked the price regulations associated with the marketing schemes, and of some of the graziers, who not only resented price fixing but were perturbed by indications that the National Party wanted to raise tariffs and increase Commonwealth powers.

These were the reasons for the force behind the demand for a country party in the period 1916-20. This chapter, however, has been concerned mainly with the strategies and tactics which the farmers' leaders employed in bringing the parties into being. In rural politics, where the tendency towards disorganization is usually stronger than the pressures for organization, the task of creating and directing political institutions is hazardous and the chances of failure are great.



4 Wheat Farming Regions, New South Wales, 1919-1920



5 State Election, New South Wales, 20 March 1920

In country party lore, the origin of each State party is traced back, link by tenuous link, to some meeting or other in a small hotel at which the idea of the party is said to have been conceived; but in fact for every such meeting thus accorded historical status there must have been hundreds that came to nothing. The man who organized a farmers' association or a country party was not dealing with a closely-knit community or with an accessible mass of people but with farmers on scattered holdings, men whose only points of contact with the wider world were the newspaper or occasional gatherings at the saleyard, the post office or the railway siding. When enthusiasm gripped these men they would attend meetings, raise the roof with their speeches, pass resolutions and form an association; they would then look for a man who could organize them and lead them; and if the chosen leader proved reliable they would back him loyally. But these moments of enthusiasm were shortlived, and unless the response from the potential leaders was rapid and constructive, the political opportunity would vanish as rapidly as it had come.

When the country party movement flared up during the war, there were enough experienced rural leaders to give it direction and form. Stewart, Hall and Hart in Victoria; Trethowan, Hunt, Wearne and Beeby in New South Wales; Gardiner and Monger in Western Australia; Vowles and Appel in Queensland—all these were men of ability and political skill. They appreciated the need to have preferential voting in federal elections if they were to eliminate the bogey of the split anti-Labor vote; they experimented with the candidate's pledge, and other methods of holding parliamentary members to account; and most of them knew from previous experience how to establish and maintain local electoral organizations.

Preoccupation with electoral success, however, blinded many of the leaders to one of their most important tasks, the need to develop a party with a distinct identity and a sense of integrity. There can be no doubt that the task of achieving the electoral breakthrough would have been much more difficult if the parties had not made so many convenient alliances, had not been so adaptable in their relations with the Nationalists, and had not obscured their basic aims in vague campaign speeches. In fact, though the confusion surrounding the intentions of the early country parties undoubtedly contributed to their success in the period around 1920, it left them a legacy of uncertainty which was to produce internal crises of major dimensions in most States within the next few years.

5

Problems of Strategy and Orientation 1920-1923

By 1920 the parliamentary Country Parties had begun the search for a strategy, and in the course of this search two separate schools of thought became clearly distinguishable. There was that of the conservatives, who argued that a country party should work closely with the National Party, and that of the radicals, who held that it should bargain support strictly in return for concessions and avoid commitments to either of the major parties. Disagreement about the party's proper role ran parallel with an equally heated argument about methods to be used in influencing policy. In 1920 the prevailing doctrine was that a country party should not join coalition governments, because this would lead to its being absorbed by the major party in the alliance; rather it should influence policy from without, preferably by public or parliamentary bargaining. Moreover, the wise country party should avoid electoral alliances wherever possible, for electoral independence formed the basis of parliamentary independence.

Few of the country parties' early leaders in Australia had the background or theoretical training of such men as W. H. Wood and E. H. Partridge of the Canadian farmers' movement, and for the most part country party doctrine remained vague and formless. Catchwords suitable for arousing emotions in election campaigns were practically useless as a guide to the problems of the party in Parliament, for after all, what did such phrases as 'measures before men' and 'neither Labor nor anti-Labor' mean in terms of parliamentary strategy and tactics? By what sanctions was a country party leader supposed to prevent his followers from drifting across to the National Party at the first opportunity? Having few precedents to guide them, the early leaders felt their way forward with caution, meeting situations as they arose, sizing up each opportunity carefully, and testing the efficacy of different tactics. Shrewd and determined men came to the fore—Dr Earle Page, Michael Bruxner, Alex Monger and John Allan on the right and Percy Stewart and Albert Dunstan on the left. The former worked out what may be called the *coalition strategy*, which envisaged an anti-Labor role for the Country Party and its co-operation with the National Party in coalition governments and electoral pacts. The rival strategy of *conditional support*, formulated by Stewart and Dunstan,

was an extension of the older tradition that a country party should avoid alliances and work to hold the balance of power in Parliament as a means of bargaining support for concessions.

At the same time that they were working out their ideas on strategy, the country party leaders were being forced to deal with the problem of maintaining the separate status of their parliamentary groups. With the notable exception of the Victorian party, the country parties as a whole were ill-assorted and amorphous, hardly distinguishable from the rural wings of the National Party. Moreover, the pressures on them to merge with the Nationalists were very great; in New South Wales and Queensland, where Labor governments were in power, the country parties were urged to shelve their differences with the Nationalists in the interest of a united anti-Labor campaign, and their reluctance to do so made it difficult for them to collect funds from business houses; in Western Australia, where the Mitchell coalition government was still in office, the Primary Producers' Association (as the F.S.A. had been renamed in 1920) found that its parliamentary country party had become almost indistinguishable from the National Party; and in all the country parties the politicians of the old school, many of them former Liberals or Nationalists, were reluctant to burn all the bridges which still linked them with the larger party—and with the opportunity of becoming cabinet members, while the new men were still rather uncertain of parliamentary conventions.

Counteracting the pressures which made for a closer association with the Nationalists were those generated by the country parties' extra-parliamentary associations, as insistent as ever that theirs should be an independent force in politics. Just as the economic changes of the war period had heightened the sectional consciousness of the interests which backed the emergent country parties, so the important debates about post-war economic policy in the years 1920-2 strengthened the determination of wheatgrowers, small graziers and dairy farmers to maintain the independence of those parties. The Massy Greene Tariff of 1921 kept one set of issues alive, and the moves to decontrol the wheat and wool industries another; at the end of 1921, when produce prices began to fall, discontented farmers revived demands for a reform of the traditional marketing and credit systems.

Pulled this way and that, without a clear doctrine or a definite strategy, the early country parties encountered a number of major crises, and were saved from a serious loss of morale only by the handful of parliamentary leaders who had the imagination to realize what was happening to the movement as a whole.

Marketing Pools and New States

Although the prices which wheat farmers had received from the wartime wheat pools compared favourably with pre-war levels, complaints had frequently been made about delays in payment and about the

disparity between the prices fixed and those ruling in London. In its last three seasons, however, the Wheat Board made amends by guaranteeing prices which were considerably better than anything the wheat industry had enjoyed for the previous thirty years and the growers' attachment to the pooling system was greatly strengthened. Wheat production fell from 179·1 million bushels in 1915-16 to 75·6 million in 1918-19. It might have risen in 1919-20 had there not been a severe drought in the eastern States, and in 1920-1 it reached a peak of 145·9 million bushels.

Net Returns to Growers (per bushel) during the Pooling Period[1]
(prices in s/d)

	Vic.	*N.S.W.*	*S.A.*	*W.A.*
1915–16	4/10·64	4/10	4/7·5	4/7·819
1916–17	4/4·65	3/3	3/3	4/3
1917–18	5/2·96	4/9·08	4/9	4/10·26
1918–19	5/6·61	5/1·09	5/4	5/7·81
1919–20	8/1·88	8/4·22	9/1	9/6·44
1920–21	7/8·81	7/6	7/4	7/9·59

By 1920 the farmers' organizations, with the sole exception of the South Australian Farmers' Committee, were strongly in favour of having the wheat pool continued as a permanent co-operative marketing venture, backed by the State. Unfortunately the wartime scheme had neither been backed by legislative authority nor even administered under the regulations of the War Precautions Act, and there was no guarantee that the Commonwealth government could now pass the necessary legislation. Had the proposal to extend the powers of the Constitution in respect of trade and commerce (sec. 51, i) been approved at the 1919 referendum this would have been a straightforward matter, but the government would have had great difficulty in establishing that the organization of a compulsory commodity pool did not conflict with section 92, guaranteeing freedom of interstate trade.[2] The scheme might even have been wound up in 1920 but for the fact that, with a large harvest in the offing, the governments of the wheat States found themselves competing for shipping space at exorbitant rates and dealing with the possibility that a premature return to the open market might

[1] W. Millar Smith, *The Marketing of Australian and New Zealand Primary Products*, p. 13.

[2] This was before the High Court decision in *W. & A. McArthur Ltd.* v. *State of Queensland* (1919-20), 28 C.L.R., 530, which while prohibiting State governments from interfering with interstate trade virtually left the Commonwealth government with comprehensive powers in this field. See Geoffrey Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1901-1929*, p. 217.

inflate Australian flour and bread prices.[3] As a result, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland passed special legislation to continue controls, and the Commonwealth government provided a guarantee of 5s. per bushel and fixed the home consumption price at 9s. per bushel.

Despite this reprieve, those who supported the scheme had little on which to pin their hopes. The Prime Minister remained opposed to control, especially to control by growers, and the agreement on which the 1920-1 pool had been based began to break up in the autumn and winter of 1921. First the South Australian Premier, H. N. Barwell, declared for the open market,[4] and then Hughes, on 28 April, announced in the House of Representatives that his government wanted the pooling arrangements to end.[5] However, the Queensland Labor government declared that it would organize a compulsory State pool whatever happened, and in May the Nationalist-Country Party coalition ministry in Western Australia made a tentative decision to stand by the pooling principle. The attitude of the National Party government in Victoria was crucial; if it came out for the scheme there was a chance that the Commonwealth government might change its policy, but, as a Country Party minister noted in a letter to the Western Australian Premier, the Victorian ministry 'appears to be neutral on the question of continuance, but apparently will be guided by the necessities of the case'.[6] On 21 June the Victorian Premier, H. S. W. Lawson, announced that his ministry favoured the decontrol of wheat marketing but on 27 July he was defeated in the Assembly by the Country and Labor Parties. The Governor granted Lawson a dissolution and he made an all-out effort to win an absolute majority of the seats in the election of 30 August, only to find that the parties were returned to the new Assembly in roughly the same proportions as before. The Country Party, however, had received a bad scare. Seven of its members refused to support a Labor censure motion on 13 September and the Lawson Ministry rewarded them by passing legislation to establish the Victorian Wheat-Growers' Corporation Ltd as a co-operative trading venture. This was backed by a government guarantee of 4s. per bushel, and was expected to compete on the open market on equal terms with the proprietary firms.[7]

[3] These considerations became obvious during the debates on the wheat pool question at the Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers in July 1920. See 'Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers', 16, 20 July 1920, pp. vii and 63-7, *C.P.P., Misc.*, 1920-1.

[4] *Argus*, 27 Apr. 1921.

[5] *C.P.D.*, vol. 95, 28 Apr. 1921, p. 7868.

[6] H. K. Maley to James Mitchell, 25 May 1921, Premier's Department File 223, Archives Section, J. S. Battye Library of Western Australian History, Perth.

[7] See below pp. 161-6.

Though the fate of the federal pool was sealed, in November 1921 the Commonwealth government undertook to provide a guarantee of 3s. per bushel for voluntary pools formed by the States, and there remained a possibility that some State pools might be organized, perhaps on the Queensland model. In New South Wales, the Labor government had the backing of the F.S.A. in its attempt to pass a bill establishing a compulsory organization, only to see it defeated in the Legislative Council; subsequently, a voluntary pool, the Wheat Growers' Pooling and Marketing Co. Ltd, was devised by the F.S.A. and the Farmers and Graziers' Co-operative Co.[8] In Western Australia, an Act was passed which continued the State compulsory pool for the 1921-2 season, after which a co-operative pool took over with Westralian Farmers Ltd as its handling agent.[9] The voluntary pools, despite the Commonwealth guarantee, were unable to maintain their grip on the wheat trade; all of them began well but in the 1923-4 season their shares of the harvest in each State had fallen to 33 per cent in New South Wales, 60 per cent in Victoria, 33 per cent in South Australia and 40 per cent in Western Australia.[10] The large proprietary firms, such as John Darling and Co., Bell and Co., and Dalgety and Co., began recovering their pre-war dominance of the handling business and, to complicate matters, international wheat prices began to fall as European grain came back on to the market. In the years 1921, 1922 and 1923, average prices on the main city markets in Australia were as follows: Sydney—8s. 8d., 5s. 8d. and 5s. 3½d.; Melbourne (average for February and March only)—7s. 3d., 4s. 9½d. and 4s. 6d.; Adelaide—9s., 5s. 1½d. and 4s. 8d.[11]

Throughout this period, the wheat farmers' organizations were always active in one field or another, whether pressing for the continuation of the wartime pools or for Commonwealth guarantees for the voluntary pools. As prices fell, they reflected the growers' interest in marketing reforms. The issues raised made it imperative that the farmers' organizations act not only as pressure groups but to maintain the integrity and fighting capacity of the parliamentary Country Parties. This need, though perhaps greatest in Victoria, was also significant in the other wheatgrowing States.

The Country Parties were involved also in the politics of wool marketing. During the 1915-16, 1916-17 and 1917-18 seasons many wheat farmers on the western slopes, New South Wales Tablelands and the northern regions of Victoria had run many more sheep than usual in

[8] See N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1921, pp. 24 and 52-3, *S.M.H.*, 18 Nov. 1921.

[9] F. R. Beasley, *Open Market versus Pooling in Australia*, pp. 43-4.

[10] Edgars Dunsdorfs, *The Australian Wheat-Growing Industry, 1788-1948*, p. 232.

[11] *N.S.W. Year Book, 1931-32*, p. 548; *Victorian Year Book, 1924-25*, p. 523; *South Australia, Statistical Register, Production, 1931-32*, p. 95.

an attempt to cash in on the prompt payments under the wool scheme and the high wartime prices for crossbred wool. In the Wimmera District, for example, the area under wheat declined from 991,000 acres in 1915 to 609,000 acres in 1918 while the number of sheep rose from 1·5 million in 1915 to 2·4 million in 1918.[12] When grain prices improved, however, wheat came back into favour, but the farmers' interest in the wool market remained, not only because they had still to receive some payments but because woolgrowing was their alternative industry when wheat prices were depressed. They had a common interest with the small graziers, therefore, in exploring the prospects for continuing the wartime wool scheme as a permanent marketing organization.

The fact that wool prices were exceptionally good at the end of 1919 and that they remained high through most of 1920 softened the process of decontrol and the wartime pool came to an end without much protest. However, the fall of prices which occurred early in 1921, when wool carried over from the Imperial Purchase period was released on the market, led small growers to demand that the wartime scheme should be revived, or that the company entrusted with realizing the 2,600,000 bales of carry-over wool, the British Australian Wool Realisation Association Ltd (BAWRA), be persuaded to widen its functions and become a permanent marketing corporation. BAWRA had been formed in January 1921 as the result of an agreement between the Australian and British governments. It had a nominal capital of £25 million and was administered by an Australian Board, headed by Sir John Higgins, the former chairman of the Central Wool Committee, and by a British Board, presided over by Sir Arthur Goldfinch, former Director of Raw Materials for the British government.[13] Higgins, who was anxious to restore the market, arranged an agreement between BAWRA and the National Council of Wool Selling Brokers of Australia (formed in 1919) whereby the former was to release one bale on the market for every two bales released by the brokers, and the actual quantities of wool released were to be regulated.[14] When several London buyers refused to co-operate, Higgins persuaded the Commonwealth government to proclaim, under the Customs Act 1901-20, that for a period of six months no wool was to be exported from Australia unless it had

[12] Production Maps in the *Victorian Year-Books, 1916-17*, facing p. 664, and *1919-20*, facing p. 452. There was a similar though less pronounced pattern in the Mallee District.

[13] The best account of BAWRA's activities is E. C. Dyason, 'BAWRA', *Economic Record*, Supplement, February 1928, pp. 51-67. See also Gerda J. Blau, 'Experiment in Wool Marketing—A Record of BAWRA's Operations', *Wool Digest of the International Wool Secretariat*, London, No. 216, 11 Mar. 1944; Beasley, op. cit., pp. 28-34; Millar Smith, op. cit., pp. 36-41, 46-8.

[14] Higgins, *British Australian Wool Realisation Association Ltd., Report of Extraordinary General Meeting*, 6 Dec. 1922, pp. 19-20.

either been bought at an average price of 8d. per lb (greasy wool) or an undertaking had been given that it would not be sold for less than that price abroad.[15] The regulation restored confidence, and wool supplies for the 1921-2 season were regulated by negotiations through an Appeal Board on which BAWRA, the Australian Woolgrowers' Council (formed in 1920) and the National Council of Wool Selling Brokers were represented.[16]

By July 1922, however, the brokers were preparing to end the arrangement, which was due to expire on 30 September, and supply wool as they saw fit. Higgins reacted by convening a special conference in August 1922 at which he suggested that BAWRA should undertake the purchase and subsequent realization of crossbred wools, whose prices were still depressed. He pointed out with some justice that supplies of crossbred wool, held both by BAWRA and by speculators, were still considerable and that an unregulated supply during the 1922-3 season might again see the bottom drop out of the market, as it had done in mid-1921 when medium and coarse crossbreds were selling at two-thirds their pre-war prices. One of the detailed schemes proposed by Higgins was adopted by the conference but the representatives of the National Council of Wool Selling Brokers refused to vote on the matter.[17] Later, having consulted the Australian Woolgrowers' Council, the brokers offered to make liberal advances against certain descriptions of crossbred wool and to grant free storage until 30 September 1923,[18] but they would not give way over the basic question of establishing a general pool.

Although defeated on this issue, Higgins nevertheless suggested that BAWRA should be transformed into a co-operative marketing organization, and a few months later he launched a campaign to bring this about. In October 1922 he announced that, in response to a requisition of BAWRA shareholders, an extraordinary general meeting of the Association had been convened for 6 December to discuss a proposal for converting BAWRA into a central agency 'for the protection, stabilisation, and development of Australian Pastoral and Agricultural Industries'. In a circular sent to all shareholders, Higgins announced that such an organization would buy produce from the growers, arrange for its shipment abroad, regulate the flow of supplies to the market and generally stabilize prices.[19] His proposal was

[15] *Commonwealth Statutory Rules*, 1921, No. 97. See also statement by Hughes, *C.P.D.*, vol. 95, 28 Apr. 1921, pp. 7868-71.

[16] See 'Address delivered by Sir John Higgins . . . at a Conference of Representatives of the Australian Wool Industry', 29 and 30 Aug. 1922, Melbourne, pp. 9-18.

[17] Ibid., pp. 31-7.

[18] *British Australian Wool Realisation Association Ltd., Report of General and Extraordinary Meetings*, 17 May 1923, p. 10.

[19] Circular letter and statement, 31 Oct. 1922.

strongly attacked by the brokers, who claimed that their experience and resources were all the wool industry required in the trading field, and by nearly all the graziers' bodies, who objected that the scheme was impractical, that it would handle other commodities besides wool, and that, since it would require government assistance, it might ultimately be subjected to government control.[20] Such considerations undoubtedly carried weight with the Graziers' Association of New South Wales, whose Council advised its members to vote against the proposal,[21] but Higgins got some support from Victoria, where over three-fifths of the wool grown was crossbred. Not only did the Pastoralists' Association of Victoria refrain from declaring its position but the V.F.U., with a number of mixed farmers and small graziers in its membership, came out solidly behind the scheme.[22]

Higgins opened the meeting on 6 December[23] by drawing attention once again to the points he had made in his circular, stressing the advantages of stabilizing the wool market, and pointing out that a co-operative organization would, by employing more efficient methods of grading, handling and distribution, increase the value of an average Australian clip by as much as £2·5 or £3·5 million. His resolution had no sooner been seconded, however, than a hostile amendment was moved and carried by the shareholders present by 600 votes to 20.[24] Constitutionally, this vote could have been reversed had Higgins been able to muster sufficient of the proxy votes (a shareholder was entitled to one vote for each share he held) which had been actively canvassed in the weeks preceding the conference, but it seems that here too Higgins lacked the numbers. Twelve million BAWRA shares, representing £1 each, had been distributed in July 1921 to more than 64,000 shareholders,[25] who included, besides woolgrowers, the representatives of several large woolbroking and stock and station agencies. However, about 53,000 small men (suppliers

[20] Circular from the National Council of Wool Selling Brokers of Australia, 3 Nov. 1922. See also letter from T. L. F. Rutledge, *S.M.H.*, 27 Oct. 1922, p. 7, and a statement by Ernest Lee-Steere, President of the Pastoralists' Association of Western Australia, *Argus*, 9 Nov. 1922, p. 12.

[21] *S.M.H.*, 23 Nov. 1922, p. 8.

[22] See report of the V.F.U. Central Council meeting on 2 Nov., which decided to support the proposal (*Farmers' Advocate*, 9 Nov. 1922, p. 3).

[23] *British Australian Wool Realisation Association Ltd., Report of Extraordinary General Meeting*, 6 Dec. 1922, Melbourne.

[24] This estimated division was given in reports by both the *Argus*, 7 Dec. 1922, p. 9, and the *S.M.H.*, 7 Dec. 1922, p. 9.

[25] In July 1921, the number of shareholders was given as 69,226 (or 69,231 if the five original cash subscribers, the directors of the Australian Board, are included), but by April 1926 the progressive sorting out of accounts had reduced this number to 64,023. *British Australian Wool Realisation Association Ltd., Report of General and Extraordinary Meetings*, 13 May 1926, Appendix B, pp. 36-7.

of wool valued at £100 or less by the Central Wool Committee) had not been issued with shares but had been paid in cash on 30 July 1921.[26] Most of these would almost certainly have been mixed farmers with a direct interest in converting BAWRA into a permanent marketing organization and they would have supported Higgins; but even had they been able to vote it is still doubtful whether he could have mustered sufficient proxy votes to tip the balance against such big shareholders as the Australian Mercantile Land and Finance Company (195,000 shares) and the Australian Estates and Mortgage Company (103,000 shares),[27] to name only two.

As the V.F.U.'s *Farmers' Advocate* pointed out, many growers had voted against the proposal because they had not been clear about the issues involved:

> it is to be feared that many wool growers, and especially the larger men who produce the finer wools, [were] animated solely in having returned to them their financial interests in Bawra, and regardless of the general wellbeing of the industry, and particularly of the smaller men, who produce the crossbred wools.

Almost as an afterthought it added: 'The growers will soon wake up, but it will be too late. The golden opportunity has gone.'[28] But it had not passed without arousing the small settler to the need for sustained political action if controlled marketing in wool was ever to be attained.

Whereas wheat and wool growers were interested in the wartime pools as a means of regulating their export trade, Australian dairy farmers were much more concerned with their effect on the local market, where price-fixing under the War Precautions Act had undoubtedly curbed profit making. Anxious to return to free-market conditions, the dairymen had no time for suggestions that the Commonwealth Dairy Produce Pool Committee, established in 1918 in conjunction with State Advisory Committees, should be made a permanent institution, or that a co-operative marketing corporation should be formed with the assistance of the Commonwealth government, as proposed by the Minister for Trade and Customs, Walter Massy Greene. The Purchase Agreement with the British Ministry of Food was continued until August 1920 in the case of cheese and until 31 March 1921 in the case of butter, with exceptionally high prices being offered in London (274s. per cwt for Australian butter).[29] However, when all imported stocks of cheese and butter in the United Kingdom were freed from control on 6 April 1921, the release of

[26] The actual number was 53,079 (ibid., p. 36).

[27] Cited in 1924 by Parker Moloney, who had consulted the BAWRA Share Register, *C.P.D.*, vol. 106, 11 June 1924, p. 1140.

[28] *Farmers' Advocate*, 7 Dec. 1922.

[29] Millar Smith, op. cit., pp. 22-3. See also Walter Massy Greene, *C.P.D.*, vol. 92, 18 Aug. 1920, pp. 3597-8.

accumulated supplies of butter depressed the market, and prices fell rapidly.[30]

The effect of declining prices was not nearly as severe in Australia as it was in New Zealand, partly because half the Australian production was being consumed locally and partly because an element of control was retained in Queensland and New South Wales. The latter State regulated dairy prices until September 1921, and Queensland continued controls through its Co-operative Dairy Companies' Association until December 1921 and through a voluntary dairy pool after that date. Nevertheless, cheese and butter prices fell steadily throughout the 1921-2 season and, despite an increased output, the value of dairy (and farmyard) production in Australia dropped from £52,613,000 in 1920-1 to £44,417,000 in 1921-2.[31] Settlers who had turned to dairy farming during the post-war boom, and who had bought land, cattle and plant at inflated prices, now found themselves in serious difficulties. By 1922 the free market idea had lost a great deal of its savour and a campaign for reinstituting the wartime controls, initiated by the Queensland Dairying Industry Advisory Board, attracted widespread support.[32] Particularly in the Gippsland region of Victoria, the dairy farmers identified the Country Party as the champion of the pooling principle. Speaking at Leongatha, in Gippsland, a member of the Victorian Country Party declared:

> Dairymen could easily do what the wheat farmers had done, and become a solid Country Party. Referring to the wheat pool, Mr. [A. L. N.] Walter said that a butter pool would be as beneficial to the dairymen as the wheat pool was to the men in the north of Victoria. . . . The only power the people can make use of is to get sufficient representation on the floor of the House. Deputations were of little good, as the records were often placed in the waste-paper basket. More organisation was wanted, when the dairying industry would be placed upon a much better footing.[33]

The dislocation of the market and the price falls associated with the decontrol of primary produce were felt most acutely by the hundreds of returned soldiers who were settled on the land in the immediate post-war period. In 1929, by which time over £58 million had been spent on soldier settlement schemes, Mr Justice Pike reported

[30] Millar Smith, op. cit., pp. 35-6.

[31] The volume of production actually rose between 1920 and 1921, from 92·9 to 119·2 thousand tons in the case of butter and from 10·8 to 14·6 thousand tons in the case of cheese. The index of Farmyard and Dairy Production Prices fell from 2493 in 1920-1 to 1727 in 1921-2 (base: 1911 = 1000). (*Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics Production Bulletin No. 21. Summary of Australian Production Statistics for the years 1916-17 to 1926-27*, Canberra, 1928, p. 71; *Bulletin No. 51*, 1958, pp. 95 and 97.)

[32] *Farmers' Advocate*, 22 Feb. 1924.

[33] Ibid., 16 Mar. 1922.

on the basis of a special inquiry that many of the soldier farmers, who were either verging on failure or had left their land, had begun farming without adequate capital, without enough land to support their families, and without sufficient practical experience or advice.[34] Although the soldier settlers did not predominate in any one region, they were numerous in the Mallee and the inland farming areas generally—in other words, those regions from which the Country Party drew its strength. They were to add a militant edge to its activities during the twenties.

Just as the Federal Country Party had established a reputation as a champion of produce pooling without having done very much to deserve it, so it acquired the title of being a low-tariff party by its opposition to certain aspects of the Massy Greene Tariff of 1921. The schedule for the new tariff, introduced to the House of Representatives on 24 March 1920, proposed the first major revision of customs duties since 1908. Farmers' organizations were divided in their attitudes towards it; opposed to the proposed increases were the Primary Producers' Association of Western Australia and the F.S.A. of South Australia; supporting the government were the Queensland Farmers' Union and Cane Growers' Association; and ranged equivocally in between were the V.F.U., the F.S.A. of New South Wales and the Tasmanian Farmers' Association, all aware of the protectionist sympathies of the dairymen and fruit farmers amongst their membership.[35] The Federal Country Party, reflecting these contrasts in miniature, was not well placed to challenge the government on a grand scale; it contained men of strong revenue tariffist views in Harry Gregory and John Prowse and an equally convinced protectionist in Alexander Hay.[36] The other members formed a rather amorphous group between these two positions.

When the schedule came up for discussion in mid-1921, therefore, the party allowed its extreme members to go their separate ways. While Gregory conducted what amounted to a single-handed assault on the general tariff, the party as a whole concentrated on two limited but useful objectives. In the first place, it attacked the increased duties proposed to be placed on imported agricultural machinery such as reapers and binders, barbed wire, wire netting and other items essential to most farming industries, and in June 1921 staged a lengthy though unsuccessful demonstration against the more important proposals in

[34] 'Report on Losses due to Soldier Settlement', Pap. 46, *C.P.P.*, 1929, vol. II. See also Fitzpatrick, *The British Empire in Australia*, pp. 277-82; F. W. Eggleston, *State Socialism in Victoria*, pp. 60-4.

[35] See P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1920, pp. 23-4 and 56; *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin* (Adelaide), 20 May 1920, p. 583; *Farmers' Advocate*, 21 July 1921; Hobart *Mercury*, 25 Oct. 1920; *Producers' Review*, 10 July 1920, 10 May 1921.

[36] See his statement *C.P.D.*, vol. 95, 27 Apr. 1921, p. 7818.

this category.[37] Secondly, it propounded the doctrine of an 'all-round' tariff policy which would provide protection to agricultural as well as secondary industries, in view of the fact that wheat farmers, for example, had to sell on an unprotected export market while buying highly-priced equipment on a protected local market.[38] The schedule was adopted without much trouble but the Country Party, by its tactics, had gained the unwarranted credit for having opposed it tooth-and-nail. The government showed its awareness of the political importance of the issues raised by putting through a small tariff schedule in 1922 (Act No. 16), reducing the duties on fencing wire, wire netting and traction engines, and replacing them with a bounty to local manufacturers.

So far we have discussed only the economic issues which emphasized rural separatism during this period, but equally important in New South Wales was the rise of the New State movement, which helped to bolster up the country wing of the State Progressive Party. The movement was strongest in the New England region, where the severe drought of 1919 had aggravated a lag in development attributed locally to the State government's failure to provide the region with adequate railway outlets and port facilities.[39] According to the argument, this failure had occurred not through neglect or scarce resources but through a deliberate policy of concentrating industrial and commercial power in Sydney even if such centralization produced the stagnation of country towns and the drift of country people to the cities; the remedy had to be political in the first instance (namely, secession from New South Wales and the creation of a new state enclosing the districts in the north-eastern corner of the old state) for only then would New England be in a position to dispose of its own resources so as to ensure the regional decentralization of trade and industry.[40]

In an attempt to popularize its ideas, the movement employed a revivalist style and a startling array of anti-urban symbols. During

[37] Ibid., 9 June 1921, pp. 8961-9; 10 June 1921, pp. 8974-90; 14 June 1921, pp. 9000-38; 15 June 1921, pp. 9048-62.

[38] See the speeches by Page, ibid., vol. 94, 7 Apr. 1921, pp. 7279-80, and Stewart, ibid., pp. 7270-1.

[39] *S.M.H.*, 12 May 1920. On the origins and character of the New State Movement see U. R. Ellis, *New Australian States*; Evelyn Moore, 'The Causes of the Agitation, after 1900, for the Establishment of a New State in Northern New South Wales', BA. Thesis, New England University College, 1953; R. S. Parker, 'Why New States?' in *New States for Australia* (Sydney, 1955); R. G. Neale, 'New States Movements', *Australian Quarterly*, September 1950, and 'The New England New State', ibid., September 1955.

[40] See, for example, 'Australia Subdivided', Glen Innes, and 'A New State, Proposed Separation of Northern New South Wales', Supplement to the *Walcha Witness*, 8 May 1915, held at the office of the New England New State Movement, Armidale.

the 1920-1 agitation, Mr V. C. Thompson, a journalist on the staff of the *Daily Observer* of Tamworth, brought out a *New State Magazine* which made a feature of cartoons transposing Mr Fat (the capitalist symbol of contemporary cartoons) into the epitome of Sydney, working for the ruin of a clean-limbed young man in a grazier's hat, the North.[41] In May 1920 Tamworth was the scene of a remarkable demonstration. Bound for the oval, a 'New State' procession marched through the town, headed by school children carrying banners with such messages as 'The North is a State going to Waste. Why let it?' and 'Where are our Factories? All in Sydney.' Amongst the floats which followed was one representing Sydney

> as a fat man eating and drinking to his heart's content, while three ragged urchins from the country stared hungrilly [*sic*] at the orgy. Overhead was the inscription, 'Sydney grows fat while the country starves.'[42]

New Statism in Australia did not have the emotional appeal of mid-western Populism in the United States, despite the closely similar anti-metropolitan myths, but it had an assured following in certain areas. As a political movement, it was essentially a regional league of local *élites*, from Grafton, from Tamworth, from Armidale, from Inverell and from Tenterfield, each with influence on the local press and each with an interest in developing the economic potential of its own district. The main pressure groups behind the movement were Chambers of Commerce and Municipal Councils, anxious to channel more trade towards their towns, local graziers' committees who felt that not enough public money had been spent on roads and railways in the region, and small farmers who resented the lack of local secondary schools for their children. The most energetic and militant leaders of the agitation were often returned soldiers, anxious both to assert themselves in a rigid and hierarchical society and to get the North a 'better deal'. In 1919, at the beginning of its post-war phase, the movement consisted of a North Coast Development League based on Grafton, and a North and North-Western Development League on the Tablelands.[43] With the formation of a Press League at Glen Innes on 6 March 1920, a number of newspapers, including the Tamworth *Daily Observer*, the *Armidale Express*, the *Tenterfield Star* and the Grafton *Examiner* began carrying articles in favour of a new State. At a further conference at Glen Innes on 23 August 1920, an executive was appointed with instructions to arrange a convention which could decide on the general aims of the movement. That

[41] See *New State Magazine* (Tamworth), July 1921, p. 1; Aug. 1921, pp. 3, 17, 25.

[42] *S.M.H.*, 27 May 1920.

[43] *Voice of the North* (Newcastle), 17 Apr. 1919, p. 5; *Daily Observer* (Tamworth), 8 Oct. 1919.

convention met at Armidale on 19-21 April 1921, and founded the Northern New State League; it also declared for a new state in northern New South Wales and, on the suggestion of Dr Earle Page, the leader of the Federal Country Party, it adopted a resolution in favour of a Federal Constitutional Convention, which would propose amendments to the Constitution (including ones facilitating the formation of new states) for approval by referendum.[44]

Chapter Six of the Constitution, governing the formation of new states, did not meet with the full approval of the northern movement. Although the Commonwealth Parliament was empowered to establish new states it could not do so without the consent of the Parliament and the approval of a majority of the electors of the State which it was proposed to subdivide (secs. 123 and 124). In 1921 the Northern New State League was agitating, not for the approval of the New South Wales Parliament for a referendum on the subject, but for changes in the Commonwealth Constitution. One proposal was that the Federal Parliament should be given the sole right to create new states; another was that in a referendum, a majority of the electors in the area of the proposed new state should suffice for popular approval. Similar objectives, again at the suggestion of Dr Page, were adopted by the Riverina Severance League at Albury on 19 and 20 May 1921.[45] Reconstituted as the Riverina New State League, this body held a further conference at Narrandera on 25 and 26 October 1921, when it decided to work for a new state incorporating the Riverina, Monaro and East Gippsland regions.[46] However, both the Northern and Riverina Leagues lost momentum after December 1921, the month in which the Commonwealth government refused to proceed with its Constitutional Convention Bill in view of the reluctance of National Party members to support the proposal.[47]

Although both Leagues numbered some Nationalists and one or two Labor men amongst their active workers, the New South Wales Progressive Party and the Federal Country Party were undoubtedly the main beneficiaries of the agitation for new states. Amongst the important leaders of the Northern League were Dr Page of the federal party and Colonel M. F. Bruxner, D. H. Drummond and R. S. Perdriau of the Progressive group, while M. Kilpatrick, another Progressive, was prominent in the Riverina movement. At election times the Leagues would back as many Nationalist as they would Country Party

[44] Testimony of V. C. Thompson, 12 Nov. 1924, *New States Royal Commission, Minutes of Evidence*, 1925, vol. 3, pp. 2055-7. See also Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, pp. 82-4.

[45] *S.M.H.*, 20, 21 May 1921. On its origin see ibid., 6 Jan. 1921; *New State Magazine*, Aug. 1921, pp. 8-10.

[46] *S.M.H.*, 26, 27 Oct. 1921; 'Riverina New State Movement', Tamworth [1922].

[47] Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1901-1929*, p. 203.

or Progressive candidates,[48] but the latter were best able to identify themselves with the movement's anti-urban sentiment, for the Nationalists were always embarrassed by the fact that half their party was drawn from Sydney.

New states, marketing reform, tariff revision, aid for soldier settlers —all these issues served to draw rural groups into closer contact with the barely established country parties and to sustain them during their adjustment to the parliamentary situation. The affected pressure groups did not establish formal relationships with the new parties in many cases; rather the country parties gained by their remoteness, by the very tenuity of their connections with the groups which had given them electoral power. Only in Victoria and to some extent in Western Australia did the executive of the farmers' organization concerned insist on its right to regulate the activity of the parliamentary Country Party. For the most part the Country Party attracted support as a composite symbol. To free traders and revenue tariffists it was a low-tariff group; to radical wheat and dairy farmers it stood for compulsory produce pools organized on co-operative lines; for small graziers it was a promising means of adjusting the balance of development between country and city and, in some cases, of keeping the Labor Party in check; to many people in northern New South Wales it stood for new states and the amendment of the Commonwealth Constitution to facilitate their creation. For all these reasons a wide range of the most powerful groups in Australian rural society wanted to have the Country Party remain an independent political force; for their part, the members of the new party appreciated the potential support and power which their separate status made possible. There was, it was clear, a social basis for a country party and a place for it in the party system, but keeping that place meant working out strategies and policies which would both hold the National Party at bay and at the same time produce material gains for rural interests. Symbolism was not enough.

The First Crises of Strategy: Victoria

Premonitions of crisis had disturbed the Victorian Farmers' Union as early as March 1918, when the four members it had returned in the election of 15 November 1917 chose to sit in different parts of the Legislative Assembly. All four had occupied places on the back ministerial benches during the short life of the Bowser Ministry (29 November 1917 to 21 March 1918), with which they had a close understanding, but after Bowser's defeat and the formation of a new National Party government under H. S. W. Lawson they had turned

[48] At the New South Wales election of 25 Mar. 1922 twelve members were returned who had been endorsed by the New State Leagues; they comprised seven Nationalists, four Progressives and one Labor man (*New State Magazine*, May 1922, p. 1).

elsewhere. The three conservative members, John Allan, Isaac Weaver and D. H. Gibson, took their seats in the ministerial corner while Percy Stewart, the Mallee leader, chose to sit in the opposition corner next to the Labor Party.[49] Stewart gave the Lawson Ministry general support but he attacked it much more frequently than did his three colleagues and, unlike them, he refused to attend meetings of the National Party. Their differences of approach were raised at the V.F.U.'s conference of September 1918 but motions aimed at preventing members of the Country Party from joining a coalition cabinet, and at restoring the unity of the parliamentary group, were either defeated or withdrawn.[50] Nor did they arouse great interest, a fact which decided one delegate to complain:

> It is true that on some of these questions it might be unwise to come to a decision at the moment, but an educative debate would have paved the way to a decision that MUST be come to sooner or later, unless we are content to send a few disintegrated units into Parliament, instead of a solid united party.[51]

The same issues were raised at the next conference, held at the end of September 1919, but again without producing a definite statement of policy. Earlier, in July 1919, the V.F.U. president had suggested to Stewart that he should sit with his fellow members, who had just been joined by Alfred Downward (Mornington), a former Nationalist who had belonged to several of the pre-war country factions. Stewart persisted in his stand: 'I have laid down the principle that if we are an independent party then we should attend the caucus meetings of no other party but our own', he said, and the only response to his challenge at the V.F.U. conference was the adoption of a resolution forbidding Country Party members from joining a cabinet in which they did not constitute a majority.[52] Order was restored later in the year when Stewart resigned his seat (Swan Hill) to stand for election to the Federal Parliament; another V.F.U. man, F. E. Old, was returned in the Swan Hill by-election but chose to sit with the rest of the party in the Assembly. In June 1920 the strength of the parliamentary group was raised to seven when it was joined by two more defecting Nationalists, John Bowser (Wangaratta) and John Carlisle (Benalla). Bowser's experience was to prove invaluable; as part-owner of the *Wangaratta Chronicle* he had great influence in the Goulburn Valley region and, with Downward, could look back on a parliamentary career beginning in 1894.

Stewart's gesture in sitting apart reflected the impatience of the V.F.U.'s radical members with the refusal of the conservatives in the

[49] *Argus*, 22 Mar. 1918.

[50] *Farmers' Advocate*, 27 Sept. 1918.

[51] Ibid., 11 Oct. 1918.

[52] Ibid., 16 Oct. 1919; *Argus*, 29 Sept. 1919.

party to realize that the group could not take over the habits and compromises of the old country factions. These radicals were small in number but they had the advantage of a highly articulate leadership in Stewart, J. J. Hall (the Union's General Secretary) and Isaac Hart, and the sound knowledge of organizational techniques which many of them had learnt in the labour movement before the war. Many of the radicals were also Roman Catholics who had broken loose from the Labor Party during the conscription crises; they found themselves out of sympathy with the leader of the parliamentary party, John Allan, the dourest of Presbyterians. None of the radicals, whether Catholic or Protestant, wanted anything to do with the Nationalists, agreeing with Stewart that:

> The Liberal Party of to-day was composed of and supported by manufacturers and captains of industry in the city, and to a lesser degree throughout the State. The machinery manufacturers and all the vested interests of Melbourne were behind the Liberal Party. How could they serve Collins street and the man on the land also?[53]

Drawn mainly from the Mallee and the northern parts of the Wimmera, the radicals became the strongest advocates of compulsory produce pools, rural credit reform, and state aid for co-operative enterprise.

The conservatives in the Victorian Country Party looked for guidance to the parliamentary leader, John Allan, a Wyuna dairy farmer and a Councillor of the Shire of Deakin. Born at Lancefield on 27 March 1866, Allan had grown up during the period when the Victorian selectors were struggling against debt and low prices to establish themselves and he had played a prominent part in the Kyabram movement of 1901-3.[54] With this background, he saw the V.F.U. more as the defender of a generalized country interest than as an organization for advancing sectional and agrarian radical demands. It was enough for him that the Union had shown its electoral strength, a gesture of defiance aimed at Melbourne, and he failed to see why he should not associate with the Nationalists in Parliament. He shared the small freeholder's suspicion of a Labor Party which he believed intended to nationalize the land and which he felt was dominated by the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. His stolidity, bluntness, and complete lack of pretence, earned him the nickname of 'Honest John' and made him a popular figure amongst country people, who had seen so many of their representatives take up 'townie' ways on going to Melbourne. Easily the most venerable of the V.F.U.'s leaders, Allan earned a reputation for impassivity and coolness, partly because of the deliberate way in which he made decisions and partly perhaps because his huge walrus moustache and thick eyebrows served to mask much of his face. As a leader

[53] *Farmers' Advocate*, 2 Jan. 1919.

[54] See above pp. 45-6. Allan was a delegate from the Kyabram Constitutional Reform Committee to the Melbourne Convention of 17 Apr. 1902 (*Age*, 27 Mar. 1902).

Allan showed himself obstinate and somewhat unimaginative; he disliked the noisiness of the Mallee men and, most of all, their radicalism. As an old V.F.U. man later remarked, 'You couldn't make a man more conservative than John Allan', and he went on to complain that the V.F.U.'s conservatives, many of them graziers from the Goulburn Valley or established farmers in the districts around Kyabram, Shepparton and Echuca, were not 'good V.F.U. men'; 'They weren't thoroughbreds. They would throw back to Liberal all the time.'[55] Allan's generation had come to politics at a time when decentralization and financial retrenchment rather than marketing pools were the ends of rural politics, and for them the Labor Party came from a world well beyond the pale.

With two such contrasting personalities as Allan and Stewart to embody their differences, the radical and conservative groups in the V.F.U. became articulate and self-conscious in a very short space of time. However, their conflict was absorbed at first by a completely dominant and insensitive centre group whose conception of the V.F.U.'s role was limited to the idea that it should serve as a solid and efficient pressure group with some help from a reliable but subordinate parliamentary wing. This group neither understood the economic programme of the radicals nor cared for the conservatives' obsession with opposing the Labor Party, which was still not an important factor in Victorian rural politics in any case. They honestly believed that the Country Party could somehow avoid taking sides in the struggle between the Labor and National Parties and concentrate single-mindedly on 'supporting measures before men'. Aware that the pre-war country factions had been unable to maintain a firm parliamentary identity, they expected that the V.F.U. would remedy this deficiency by providing an independent source of electoral power and by pledging its candidates to support the Union's programme at all times. 'Without a signed pledge', noted the *Farmers' Advocate* in 1920, 'there is no assurance of cohesion in the V.F.U. Country Party.'

> It is only fair and just to the thousands of men and women who comprise the political movement outside Parliament that their parliamentary representatives should give them some guarantee that they will stick together in one party or group to give effect to the objectives and policy upon which they have been elected.[56]

This brand of reasoning was characteristic of the V.F.U.'s most typical and middle-of-the-road leader, W. C. Hill, who as president had declared in 1917:

> We have thousands of members in our ranks who have been in the past supporters of Labor and Liberal Parties, but we have come together on one common platform, and are out in the interests of

[55] Interview with Mr Harold Hanslow, Melbourne, 20 Aug. 1956.

[56] *Farmers' Advocate*, 1 Apr. 1920.

> decentralisation, for the building up of country industries, for increasing Victorian export trade, and for the building up of primary production. We are neither Liberal nor Labor.[57]

During the 1918-20 Parliament, the V.F.U.'s parliamentary group maintained a close relationship with the Lawson government. Since the National Party controlled more than 35 members in a House of 65, Lawson had no need to insist on a guarantee of support from the Country Party; nevertheless Allan and his colleagues backed the government on most issues, attended meetings of the National Party, and were consulted about policy matters. Stewart disclosed that the Minister of Agriculture

> had repeatedly come into their party room and discussed proposed bills with them, urging that the Government was sympathetic with the V.F.U. movement, and that anything in reason it asked for would be granted. Suggestions made by the party were taken by Mr. Oman [the minister] and communicated to the Government, who acted accordingly.[58]

However, in the campaign which preceded the election of 21 October 1920, the National Party was disturbed to find that the V.F.U. had nominated candidates in about two-thirds of the rural constituencies, in many cases against sitting Nationalists. Lawson pointed out that since the two parties 'had so much in common' some arrangement about candidates should have been possible but that if the Country Party wanted a fight the ministry was not afraid of one.[59]

The period of the V.F.U.'s political innocence was drawing to a close, for the result of the 1920 election (in which 30 Nationalist, 1 Independent Nationalist, 13 Country Party, 20 Labor and 1 Independent Labor member had been returned) had left the Lawson government two short of a majority in the Assembly and hence in much greater need of Country Party support. 'We had got the coveted balance of power', a V.F.U. man recalled later, 'and we in our inexperience thought we had all that was necessary or desirable.'[60] An instance of that inexperience was provided in November 1920 when the Country Party moved a censure motion against the government, apparently in the hope that Allan might form a new ministry with the aid of dissident Nationalists. The motion was defeated by 41 votes to 19 on 25 November, but only because the Labor Party had voted for the government.[61]

This had been an unreal crisis, but a serious one threatened when,

[57] Ibid., 9 Nov. 1917.

[58] Ibid., 14 Oct. 1920. See also Allan, *V.P.D.*, vol. 156, 23 Nov. 1920, p. 189.

[59] *Argus*, 1 Sept. 1920.

[60] 'State Elections, Lowan. The Hon. M. E. Wettenhall's Policy Speech. Band Hall, Dimboola, Tuesday, March 22, 1927', Dimboola, 1927, p. 4.

[61] *V.P.D.*, vol. 156, 25 Nov. 1920, p. 316. See also *Argus*, 24 Nov. 1920.

on 21 June 1921, the Premier announced that his government was in favour of ending the compulsory wheat pool which had been in operation since 1915.[62] On 9 July a poll of wheatgrowers conducted by the V.E.U. and the Chamber of Agriculture resulted in a vote of 78 per cent in favour of the pool's continuation.[63] On 12 July, the State Parliament having reassembled for its second session, Allan submitted a motion expressing a lack of confidence in the Lawson Ministry for its failure to include a wheat pool in the Governor's speech, to open up Crown lands for soldier and other settlement, to combine the hydro-electric projects with the scheme for producing electricity from brown coal at Morwell, and to open up the 'outer ports'.[64] The Labor Party at first hesitated but finally came round to support Allan's move. The government then tried to placate the Country Party with an offer to establish a voluntary wheat pool with a guarantee to growers of 3s. per bushel, but on 27 July Country Party and Labor members voted together to defeat the Nationalists by 33 votes to 28.[65] Governor Stradbroke agreed to grant Lawson's request for a dissolution of Parliament and immediate preparations were made for an election campaign.

How had the Country Party come to play such a part in this episode? In the first place, Allan and the V.F.U.'s Central Council, whose officials were on hand throughout the crisis, had been agreed on defeating the government if necessary. Their motives, however, appear to have differed: Allan and some of his supporters seem to have acted under the impression that the Governor, instead of granting a dissolution, would commission Allan to form a ministry,[66] whereas the V.F.U.'s Council, under strong pressure from the Mallee and Wimmera branches, was primarily concerned about having the wheat pool preserved, if not by the Lawson Ministry then by a Labor government holding office with Country Party support. Those members with seats in the wheat belt would have committed electoral suicide by not supporting the motion, while the others were persuaded to follow Allan's lead, having ensured that the original motion covered a wider range of issues than the wheat pool. The party's major tactical error, considering the logic of the situation, lay in not assuring the Governor and the Labor Party that it would provide conditional support to a

[62] *Argus*, 22 June 1921. For the background to this issue see above pp. 144-7.

[63] The detailed results of the poll were:

Voting papers distributed	20,684
Voting papers returned	17,149
Votes for Growers' Compulsory Pool	13,142
Votes for Open Market	2,332
Votes for Government Compulsory Pool	1,675

(Sources: *V.P.D.*, vol. 169, 30 Sept. 1925, p. 1391; *Argus*, 25 July 1921, p. 8.)

[64] *V.P.D.*, vol. 157, 12 July 1921, p. 111.

[65] Ibid., vol. 157, 27 July 1921, p. 350.

[66] See *Argus*, 20, 28 July 1921.

Labor Ministry committed to continue the wheat pool; according to one V.F.U. member, Labor and Country Party representatives had conferred about this possibility but without reaching agreement.[67] In any case, Allan was probably more concerned in his interview with Lord Stradbroke to explore the prospects of a ministry of his own.

The election was fought with great bitterness. Sounding almost like a populist, Allan accused Lawson of obeying the mandate of 'the wheat merchants and speculators of Melbourne' while the Premier claimed that the V.F.U.'s proposal to have the wheat pool continued under growers' control was 'syndicalism . . . an extreme form of French communistic trades unionism, of which an American variant is the notorious I.W.W. movement'.[68] For the first time, the V.F.U. found itself fighting for its life against the full force of the Nationalist machine and receiving indirect assistance from its *de facto* ally, the Labor Party. George Prendergast, the Labor leader, claimed later that in 'half-a-dozen constituencies we deliberately drove Labor electors over to vote for Farmers Union candidates'.[69] The poll, held on 30 August, resulted in the return of 31 National, 12 Country Party, 21 Labor members, and 1 Independent; the Lawson Ministry had failed to regain its majority and the Country Party still held the balance of power in the Assembly. In fact, however, the V.F.U. had been badly shaken; it had lost Grenville and had barely retained its hold on Lowan and Mornington; except in about four cases, its voting strength had fallen from the 1920 level.[70]

There were reports of V.F.U. rank-and-file members defecting to the National Party, and one of the defectors actually stood as a Nationalist

[67] M. W. J. Bourchier, *Argus*, 11 Aug. 1921.

[68] 'Policy Speech delivered by The Hon. H. S. W. Lawson, Premier of Victoria, at Castlemaine, 8th August, 1921', Melbourne, [1921], p. 5. See also *Argus*, 9, 10 Aug. 1921.

[69] *V.P.D.*, vol. 159, 22 Nov. 1921, p. 1202.

[70] Any comparison of Victorian election results is made difficult by the fluctuating number of uncontested seats and of three- and four-way contests. Of the 18 seats contested by the V.F.U. in 1921, the results in 12 can be compared with those of the 1920 election. The percentage gain or loss in the V.F.U.'s voting strength in these 12 seats is given below:

Percentage Increase, 1920-1		*Percentage Decrease, 1920-1*	
Eaglehawk	+4·35	Korong	−18·73
Goulburn Valley	+2·46	Mornington	−12·68
Gunbower	+2·17	Rodney	−10·28
Borung	+0·40	Gippsland South	−5·55
		Lowan	−4·35
		Swan Hill	−2·91
		Benalla	−1·21
		Upper Goulburn	−0·21

It should be noted that the V.F.U. lost a great deal of support in country towns at the 1921 election.

candidate, having accused his former party of 'standing for only a section of the people'.[71] Allan and those close to him in the parliamentary Country Party were therefore anxious to avoid any further adventures and to repair their relations with the Lawson Ministry, even if this meant sacrificing the compulsory wheat pool. According to an article published later in the *Farmers' Advocate*, five members of the parliamentary group had pledged even before Parliament met not to oppose the ministry to the length of putting Labor in power,[72] and Albert Lind (Gippsland East) was reported to have admitted that the government had promised concessions in public works and land settlement policy for his electorate in accordance with Country Party views.[73] In addition, Lawson had renewed his offer of a voluntary pool, controlled by a growers' board, and increased the government guarantee from 3s. to 4s. per bushel.[74] It was an attractive proposition, especially when weighed against the fact that the ultra-conservative Legislative Council would be most unlikely to approve a bill for a compulsory pool, especially a bill sponsored by a Labor government. Moreover, the Labor and Country Parties did not see eye to eye on the question of marketing pools; Labor wanted them to be state-controlled as well as state-financed whereas the Country Party favoured growers' control, with just enough state assistance to make them compulsory and financially sound.

When the inevitable Labor censure motion was put to the test on 13 September, then, the Country Party split, seven members voting for the government and five with the Labor Party; the motion was rejected by 37 votes to 26.[75] Of the five who sided with Labor, F. E. Old (Swan Hill), M. E. Wettenhall (Lowan) and David Allison (Borung) were clearly voting to keep faith with the electors in the Mallee and Wimmera wheatlands, but their spokesman, Albert Dunstan (Eaglehawk) and John Carlisle (Benalla) had taken a stand on principle. Dunstan had declared:

> For my own part, judging by the antagonistic attitude adopted by the Government towards the producers and country interests generally, I would be prepared to say to the Labor Party, 'Go on to the Treasury bench and I will take all the risks that may come along.'[76]

[71] Peter Hansen (Korong), *Argus*, 29 Aug. 1921.

[72] *Farmers' Advocate*, 22 Sept. 1921.

[73] *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 24 Sept. 1921, p. 4.

[74] *Argus*, 9 Sept. 1921.

[75] *V.P.D.*, vol. 158, 13 Sept. 1921, p. 59. The Country Party members divided as follows:

For the motion: D. Allison, J. J. Carlisle, A. A. Dunstan, F. E. Old, and M. E. Wettenhall.

Against the motion: J. Allan, M. W. J. Bourchier, J. Bowser, A. Downward, A. E. Lind, E. J. Mackrell, and I. J. Weaver.

[76] Ibid., vol. 158, 13 Sept. 1921, p. 56.

Dunstan, who now shared with Stewart the leadership of the radical wing of the Victorian party, was already a shrewd politician with a sense of timing and drama which Allan lacked. The vigour and crudity of his speeches made Dunstan a formidable opponent and Allan, despite his initial advantage, was to find himself on the defensive before the attacks of the younger man.

Their first major clash occurred at the V.F.U.'s Sixth Annual Conference, which opened at Geelong on 14 September. Although its proceedings were held *in camera*, it has been possible to reconstruct from interviews and references in the *Farmers' Advocate* the main outlines of what happened.[77] Wheat farmers and radicals amongst the delegates had made the long train journey from the north determined to settle accounts with those who had voted with the government and, in their view, against the compulsory wheat pool. One by one the politicians took the floor to state their case, Allan's men defending themselves and Dunstan's supporters denouncing them. 'I thought they were men of steel', cried Dunstan in his high-pitched voice, 'but they're men of dough.' Allan put his case to a hostile audience on the 15th but the chairman refused to allow questions. The early anger had worn off by this time, and no action was taken to censure the erring parliamentarians. To quote Harold Hanslow, 'The Conference thought no good purpose would be served by expelling them & they were told to be good boys & not do it again.'[78] For the moment, however, the radicals were in a position to press their point of view, which found expression in the conference resolution that:

> the Union define its position in regard to the other two political parties by definitely affirming that it is neither anti-Labour nor anti-Nationalist, but as [*sic*] a distinct and separate party, prepared to support any legislation from any part of the House, which is designed in the best interests of the State and nation.[79]

Thus, the solid mass of moderate opinion amongst the delegates had prevented the radicals from obtaining an unequivocal statement that the Country Party should not bind itself to support the National Party unconditionally, nor had the V.F.U. Central Council been given any clear authority to take disciplinary action in the event of a further split amongst the parliamentary members.[80] The position was partly clarified later in the year, when the parliamentary party decided that:

> the executive of the [parliamentary] party shall call a special and full meeting, when necessary, and submit to the party the following resolutions:

[77] Especially interview with Mr Harold Hanslow, Melbourne, 20 Aug. 1956. See also *Farmers' Advocate*, 22 Sept., 20 Oct. 1921.

[78] Letter from Mr Harold Hanslow to writer, 11 Nov. 1956.

[79] *Argus*, 17 Sept. 1921.

[80] See, in this connection, the editorial in *Farmers' Advocate*, 22 Sept. 1921.

(a) That the party discuss and determine whether or not the business is vital; and
(b) That if after full discussion a majority of the party declares the business to be vital a simple majority shall bind the whole party.[81]

This resolution was approved by a meeting of the V.F.U.'s Central Council on 2 November, when the following motion was also adopted:

> That this Council deeply regrets the undertaking given publicly by some of our Parliamentary [Representatives] that under no circumstances would they vote for a measure which might result in the occupation of the Treasury Benches by the Labor Party; regards such pledge as an unfortunate violation of the principles of our independence as a Party, and as a voluntary surrender of our balance of power. In the interests of our Organisation this Council strongly urges Members to abstain from giving such pledges in the future.[82]

Meanwhile, the Lawson Ministry had brought in legislation to establish the promised voluntary pool, in the form of the Victorian Wheat-Growers' Corporation Ltd, with the agreed guarantee of 4s. per bushel. The crisis had run its course.

The V.F.U.'s radicals had fought two battles; one for a compulsory wheat pool, which they had lost, and another for a decision on strategy, which they had partly won. In principle at least the V.F.U. Conference and Central Council had agreed that the parliamentary Country Party should form alliances with neither the National nor the Labor Party, and that its main purpose in politics, having won the balance of power in the Legislative Assembly, was to bargain for concessions from the government of the day and to remove it from office if it did not receive satisfaction. Electorally, this approach meant that pacts and understandings were to be avoided; in Parliament, it meant that the Country Party should maintain its separate identity and vote as a unit on all vital issues. As the resolutions quoted above show, the V.F.U.'s leadership had now acquired an awareness of the party's doctrinal and strategic problems which was well in advance of their thinking of even a year before. Already the basic principles of the distinctive conditional-support strategy, for which the radicals were to fight so bitterly, had been laid down. But the conservatives had also learnt from the crisis, and in the months ahead Allan and his supporters were to argue with increasing conviction that the Country Party should adopt an anti-Labor role, and join with the National Party in forming coalition governments and electoral alliances. The Victorian Country Party was not to achieve unanimity over policy for many years to come.

The First Crises of Strategy: New South Wales

Besides defining its strategy, the early Country Party had to establish its identity, to decide definitely on what social groups and regions it

[81] *Argus*, 4 Nov. 1921.
[82] *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 2, 2 Nov. 1921, p. 164.

was going to build its future. In Victoria, the party began as a farmers' movement and then, in the twenties, made a conscious effort to attract the support of graziers and country townsmen; instead of being described as 'the V.F.U. Party' the parliamentary group became known as 'the Country Party' and its regional rather than its sectional character was emphasized. However, whereas in Victoria this process of expansion and consolidation was kept under control, in other States the country parties had great difficulty in establishing where their social territory ended and that of the National Party began. The confusion which reigned at all levels—in parliament, in elections, and in the business of organizing support—made life very difficult for the young parties, for until their existence had been recognized and their frontiers established they were constantly exposed to the danger that a larger party, in this case the National Party, might absorb their parliamentary members and encroach on their electoral reserves.

These lessons were driven home by a political incident in South Australia at the end of 1920; it was a small affair, but it aroused great interest in country party circles in Victoria and New South Wales. The South Australian F.S.A. had decided to form a separate country party in 1917[83] and in the State election of 6 April 1918 had elected one member to the House of Assembly and one to the Legislative Council. In the closing months of 1920 an attempt was made to absorb the F.S.A. into a Country Progressive Party, alongside a group of dissident Liberals and the State National Party (which was still separate from the Liberal Union). A group of F.S.A. enthusiasts constituted themselves into a 'Preservation Committee' and convened a special conference of their Association in March 1921, when the delegates voted by 68 to 24 to reject the fusion proposal and elected a new executive.[84] Its unity restored, the F.S.A. contested the election of 9 April 1921, in which it won four seats. However, the total result (Liberal 25, Progressive Country Party 1, F.S.A. 4, and Labor 16) still left the Liberal government with an absolute majority and, without the balance of power, the F.S.A.'s members were unable to achieve a great deal. The danger of merger, however, had made the deepest impression on the Country Party leaders in other States, and at the time of the crisis the secretaries of both the A.F.F.O. and the V.F.U. had written to the F.S.A. advising it to refuse the proposal for fusion.[85]

In New South Wales, meanwhile, a merger between the Progressive and National Parties had come within the bounds of possibility. After the State election of 20 March 1920 the position in the 90-member

[83] *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin* (Adelaide), Sept. 1917, pp. 43-4.

[84] See 'F.S.A. Case Against Amalgamation', Adelaide, [1921]; 'The F.S.A. Still a Separate Political Entity', Adelaide, 1921; *Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin* (Adelaide), Dec. 1920, pp. 695-8; Jan. 1921, p. 5; Feb. 1921, pp. 19-26; Mar. 1921, pp. 40-2; *Advertiser*, 19 Oct., 3 Nov., 15, 21 Dec. 1920; 5 Mar. 1921; *Farmers' Advocate* (Melbourne), 10 Mar. 1921.

[85] 'F.S.A. Case Against Amalgamation', pp. 7-8.

Legislative Assembly was: Labor 44, National 27, Progressive 15 with four Independents, of whom one was Independent Labor. The Nationalist Premier, W. A. Holman, having failed to persuade the Progressive Party to support his government,[86] resigned his commission and a Labor ministry, with John Storey as Premier, took office on 13 April 1920. Labor governed for the next twenty months with a majority of one, the Independent Labor member, and would have been denied even this security had not a Nationalist, Daniel Levy, agreed to act as Speaker. Storey calmed the Opposition with his moderation but after his death early in October 1921 the Labor Party's more radical elements came to the fore. James Dooley became the new Premier on 10 October and on 29 November J. T. Lang, the Treasurer, brought down a budget which proposed to increase taxes by £2 million and to have Parliament (rather than the Board of Trade) declare a basic wage of £4.5s. per week for all classes of labour.[87] On 6 December an Industrial Arbitration Act Amendment Bill was introduced to implement the latter proposal, and on the same day George Fuller, who had succeeded Holman as leader of the National Party after the latter's defeat in the 1920 election, announced that he would propose a motion of censure against the government for its taxation proposals.[88]

Fuller was in close touch with Walter Wearne, who had been elected leader of the Progressive Party immediately after the 1920 election. Born at Sydney on 2 September 1867, Wearne worked a 5,000-acre grazing property at Bingara, in northern New South Wales, and was a prominent member of the F.S.A. Elected for Namoi in 1917, he had quickly earned a reputation as an expert on land legislation and had been the leading figure of the Country Parliamentary Committee of 1918-19. Unlike those Progressive members returned for the first time in 1920, he had worked with the leading Nationalists and enjoyed their company, especially that of George Fuller and C. W. Oakes. From the outset he had resented attempts by the more independent of the Progressives to keep Fuller and his colleagues at a distance, and had written in January 1921:

> Although at all times willing to be advised by friends and supporters of my party, as leader of that party I refuse to be dictated to by any outside body as to amalgamation or otherwise with any other political party. With me the door is open, and will remain open, and when the time comes for publishing the plan of attack to defeat the enemy I will not hesitate to act.[89]

[86] *S.M.H.*, 7 Apr. 1920.

[87] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 85, 29 Nov. 1921, pp. 2160-81.

[88] Ibid., 6 Dec. 1921, pp. 2436-48; 13 Dec. 1921, pp. 2601-2.

[89] *Daily Telegraph*, 1 Feb. 1921. Wearne was criticized for this statement at a meeting of the Progressive Party Central Council on 23 Feb. 1921 but denied that he had advocated an amalgamation of the two parties (Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, p. 58).

While Holman had been leader of the National Party, conservative men such as Wearne had suspected it of having a radical bent, but Fuller was a man they could trust. When in October 1921 Fuller had suggested an electoral alliance between the two parties, only to have it rejected by the Progressives, Wearne had pointed out that this did not 'prevent co-operation between the two parties in Parliament on all matters on which our opinions are the same'.[90] Lang's proposal to bring all workers, including agricultural labourers, within the basic wage system convinced Wearne that the time had come for such co-operation—otherwise 'the primary producer would be forced out of occupation, and the men he employed, together with the farmer himself, would be forced to join the unemployed'.[91]

Wearne and Fuller obtained an assurance from Levy, the Speaker, that he would resign if the two parties agreed to co-operate,[92] and Fuller claimed that one or two Labor members had promised to vote for his censure motion.[93] Given this information, a meeting of the parliamentary Progressive Party decided to support the censure motion and to keep in office any subsequent National Party government, which would be expected to secure the early dissolution of Parliament.[94] On 8 December Levy resigned as Speaker and on the 13th a Labor member was appointed in his place; shortly afterwards the Labor government was defeated on an adjournment motion by 45 votes to 44.[95] Dooley, having resigned his commission, requested an immediate dissolution, but the Governor refused to agree to this and gave Fuller a week to explore the prospects of forming a ministry.[96] However, instead of preparing to form a purely National Party government, which the Progressives were prepared to support, Fuller began negotiations for a coalition ministry composed of representatives of the two non-Labor parties.

This move greatly complicated the situation. For many Progressives, a coalition meant only one thing—the reasonable expectation that the Progressive parliamentary party was about to be absorbed into the National Party. Although united in their opposition to the Labor

[90] *S.M.H.*, 19, 20 Oct. 1921.

[91] Ibid., 6 Feb. 1922.

[92] Statements by E. A. Buttenshaw (ibid., 20 Jan. 1922) and Wearne (ibid., 6 Feb. 1922). For a full account of Progressive Party deliberations during this crisis see Ellis, op. cit., pp. 60-6. The writer discussed this period in interviews with Mr Hugh Main (Canberra, 17 July 1956) and Colonel M. F. Bruxner (Sydney, 28 June 1956).

[93] Statement by M. Kilpatrick, *S.M.H.*, 19 Jan. 1922. See also Ellis, op. cit., p. 61.

[94] Statements by the 'True Blues' (*S.M.H.*, 21 Dec. 1921), and T. J. Ley (ibid., 9 Jan. 1922).

[95] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 85, 13 Dec. 1921, p. 2602.

[96] *S.M.H.*, 14 Dec. 1921.

Party, the Progressive members of Parliament were divided over what principles should guide the party in its dealings with the Nationalists. The advocates of a close association, coalition ministries and election pacts were the city members, T. R. Bavin (who had become the party's deputy leader after George Beeby's appointment to the Industrial Arbitration Court in August 1920), T. J. Ley, J. W. Macarthur Onslow, and J. Wilson. They had some ground in common with a group of country members, including Wearne, R. S. Perdriau, Walter Bennett and T. H. Hill, who saw advantages (including cabinet posts and a more direct influence on policy) in arranging an alliance with the Nationalists but who at the same time appreciated the importance of maintaining a degree of separate status for their own group.[97] Finally, there was a third group of younger members, centred around M. F. Bruxner, D. H. Drummond and E. A. Buttenshaw, who were convinced that if the Progressive Party were to identify itself too closely with the National Party it would lose its independence and the great prestige which this had given its members at election time.

In view of the fact that Bruxner's position was also that of the F.S.A. Executive and of A. E. Hunt, the president of the Graziers' Association, Wearne and Bavin may have had doubts of their ability to sway the anti-coalition wing of the party, but in any case they chose to act boldly. On Friday 16 December, Fuller sent word to a meeting of the parliamentary Progressive Party stating that he considered a coalition desirable and that he was prepared to discuss the matter with Wearne.[98] The party approved the proposal by seven votes to six, Bavin, Ley, Perdriau, Wilson, Macarthur Onslow, Bennett and Hill voting for the motion and Bruxner, Buttenshaw, Drummond, T. L. F. Rutledge, Hugh Main and M. Kilpatrick forming the opposition; Wearne did not vote and R. A. Price, who was absent, later declared himself against the proposal.[99] On the same day Wearne referred the coalition plan to the Progressive Party Central Council, which divided eight votes to eight on the question of acceptance; A. E. Hunt, who was chairman, gave his casting vote in the negative to provide another opportunity of considering the matter.[1] Wearne, Bavin, Fuller, C. W. Oakes and others conferred over the week-end, and the morning papers on Monday the 19th announced that a coalition would be formed. The terms of the agreement were that there was to be no pre-selection of election candidates, that the election campaigns of both parties were to be controlled by a joint committee, that five of the cabinet

[97] See the statement by Perdriau, *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 83, 15 Sept. 1921, p. 441, in which he envisaged a Progressive-Nationalist coalition being formed now that 'Holmanism' had 'been expunged from the National Party'.

[98] Statement by C. W. Oakes, *S.M.H.*, 21 Jan. 1922.

[99] Ellis, op. cit., p. 61. See also statement by Buttenshaw, *S.M.H.*, 24 Jan. 1922.

[1] Statement by A. E. Hunt, *S.M.H.*, 24 Jan. 1922.

posts and the deputy premiership would go to Progressives, and that the separate entity of each party would be preserved.[2]

On the evening of the 19th, Wearne and Bavin again consulted the Progressive Party Central Council, but made it clear that they were already committed to the agreement. The Council nevertheless decided to vote on the question of acceptance again, and the result was another even vote, nine to nine, but because of objections Hunt did not exercise a casting as well as a deliberative vote. The Central Council was at this time composed of five representatives each of the F.S.A., the Graziers' Association, and the city branches of the party, and three representatives of the parliamentary group, giving eighteen members altogether.[3] If the division list is analysed, the following alignment emerges: voting against the coalition were the five F.S.A. delegates, A. E. Hunt of the Graziers' Association, two city delegates and Rutledge of the parliamentary delegation; voting in the affirmative were four delegates of the Graziers' Association, Macarthur Onslow, Bavin and Ley as representatives of city branches, and Wearne and Perdriau as nominees of the parliamentary party.[4] Had Hunt voted with the other

[2] Ibid., 20 Jan. 1922.

[3] *The Progressive Party of New South Wales, Constitution and Rules*, Sydney, 1920. The admission of the representatives of the city branches was approved in 1921.

[4] Ellis, op. cit., pp. 61-2. Ellis seems to have relied on a pamphlet in his private collection of documents, 'The Real History of the Coalition. A Final Word from the Seven Progressives', Sydney, March 1922, which apparently differs in several respects from the statements made by Wearne, Bruxner, Hunt and the other principal actors in January-February 1922 (see notes 93 ff. above). The Central Council minutes for this period do not contain any record of a meeting on either 16 or 19 December so one must presume that no minutes were taken.

With regard to the division on the 19th, Ellis gives it as applying to the meeting of the 16th as well as that of the 19th, but this does not square with Hunt's testimony (*S.M.H.*, 24 Jan. 1922).

The details of the division on the 19th are as follows (votes for and against the coalition agreement):

F.S.A.	Against: T. I. Campbell, E. A. Buttenshaw (M.L.A.), W. W. Killen, A. K. Trethowan (M.L.C.), H. P. Williams.
G.A.	Against: A. E. Hunt. For: J. Mackay, O. E. Friend, N. W. Kater, F. B. Fleming.
Metropolitan	Against: B. Addison, C. H. Algie.
P.P. Branches	For: J. W. Macarthur Onslow (M.L.A.), T. R. Bavin (M.L.A.), T. J. Ley (M.L.A.).
Parliamentary	Against: T. L. F. Rutledge (M.L.A.).
Party	For: W. Wearne (M.L.A.), R. S. Perdriau (M.L.A.).

The names in the above division are taken from Ellis, p. 61, and the affiliations from the following sources: *N.S.W. Graziers' Annual, 1921*, p. 8; N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1921, p. 118; *S.M.H.*, 21 Nov., 24 Dec. 1921. See also N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1922, p. 142.

graziers' delegates, or had the city branches' delegation not split, the coalition might well have been approved and the crisis taken a different direction. Had the Council voted to endorse the agreement, Bruxner's following in the parliamentary party would perhaps have accepted the situation or, if some of them had chosen to persist in their stand, the F.S.A. might have been obliged to form a country party of its own.

As it was, the division within the party began to harden. On the morning of the 20th, the seven members of the parliamentary party who had opposed the coalition (they were soon to call themselves the 'True Blues') met and declared that while they were prepared to accept the proposal that the party should support a National Party government committed to obtain a dissolution, they had not 'agreed to any step which might jeopardise the political entity of the party'.[5] In the afternoon, Fuller's coalition government, which included Bavin, Wearne, Ley and Perdriau as its Progressive members, was sworn in. The Assembly met, and the Speaker, a Labor man, promptly resigned; Daniel Levy, who objected to the coalition, stood for re-election to this office and was appointed. Thus deprived of his majority, Fuller resigned his commission in the evening after seven hours in office. On the following day, Dooley formed a caretaker cabinet and subsequently arranged for an election to be held on 25 March 1922.

There was never any doubt that the F.S.A. would support the True Blues. Its unofficial journal, *Land*, came out in their favour on 23 December, and on 5 January 1922 the F.S.A. Executive censured the pro-coalition group and accepted Wearne's resignation as vice-president of the Association.[6] But the decision of the Council of the Graziers' Association could not be taken for granted; although it had been willing enough to support the Progressive venture in the federal election of 1919 and the state election of 1920, some of its most prominent members looked upon the Progressive Party's claim to independence as a luxury which could not be allowed to affect the solidarity of the anti-Labor forces. That many ordinary members of the Association were sympathetic to this point of view had been made clear at its 1920 conference, when a motion to have the executive negotiate a reconciliation between the Progressive and National Parties had been defeated by only 39 votes to 33.[7] Moreover, the Association was aware that some of the most important pastoral interests had never liked the country party idea; for example, in March 1920 the General Manager of Goldsbrought, Mort and Co. Ltd had written to say that his firm would not contribute to the Association's Special Purposes Fund, on the grounds that it was necessary for the forces opposed to the Labor Party to avoid fighting amongst themselves.

> The 'Farmers' party in the Federal Parliament is already showing itself to be a thorn in the side of the Government. In normal times it might not be a bad thing for a Ministry to have candid friends to

[5] *S.M.H.*, 21 Dec. 1921. [6] Ibid., 6 Jan. 1922. [7] Ibid., 26 May 1920.

> turn the limelight on their failings, but at this critical period the section of the community that stands for Law and Order should show a united front to the sections that, in varying degrees, stand for the subversion of our present system of Government and economics.[8]

Had it not been for the personal influence of W. W. Killen, who was both president of the F.S.A. (1921-2) and a member of the G.A. Council, and of A. E. Hunt, who was the F.S.A.'s treasurer and at the same time president of the G.A. (1921-2), the Association might well have turned its back on the country party movement at this time.[9]

On 16 January 1922 the Graziers' Association Council declared for the True Blues, but its recommendations to the Progressive Party Central Council suggested that a great deal was written between the lines. The G.A. recommended that the Central Council should not endorse coalition candidates (that is those standing in the Fuller-Wearne interest) but nevertheless urged the Progressives to support 'an incoming National Government, as long as it acts in accord with the Progressive party platform'. In addition, the G.A. suggested that there should be an exchange of preferences between Progressives and other non-Labor candidates and that the Progressive Party Central Council should impress upon candidates the need to avoid 'abuse and recrimination' during the election campaign. The resolution embodying these proposals was adopted by eleven votes to two, and another one recommending that the Progressive Party should withdraw from city electorates and concentrate on country seats was approved by eight votes to six. These proposals were adopted later on the same day by the Progressive Party Central Council.[10] It is probable that the surprising willingness of the G.A. Council to accept the True Blue position was governed as much by its concern to prevent a serious breach in the anti-Labor front just before an election as by its concern to keep alive a going concern in which it had invested so much time and money.

The lines at the parliamentary level were now drawn more firmly. On 20 January the newspapers published an agreement spelling out the terms of the coalition which Wearne and Fuller proposed to form if Labor were defeated.[11] On 24 January the True Blue Progressives met and chose Bruxner as their leader.[12] Both groups fought separate election campaigns but each of them and the Nationalists avoided

[8] Goldsbrough, Mort and Co. Papers, A.N.U. Repository, Letter Book C.P. 26, pp. 921-2.

[9] This fact was discussed by the Hon. D. H. Drummond in an interview with the writer (Canberra, 4 Oct. 1956).

[10] For lengthy extracts from this resolution see Ellis, op. cit., pp. 64-5, taken from *Minutes of the Progressive Party Central Council*, 16 Jan. 1922. See also *S.M.H.*, 18 Jan. 1922.

[11] Ibid., 20 Jan. 1922. Cited by Ellis, op. cit., p. 65.

[12] *S.M.H.*, 25 Jan. 1922.

conflict in the nomination of candidates and in policy matters to a degree which suggests that there may have been some formal liaison between them. Their co-operation was dictated by changes in the electoral law; the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections (Amendment) Act 1921 had modified the proportional representation system by making the indication of preferences by the voter compulsory only for the number of members to be elected in a constituency (three in the country and five in the city), thereby relieving Labor supporters of the need to allocate preferences which would help Progressives defeat Nationalists, as had been the case in 1920, and making it more necessary than ever that the non-Labor parties advise their supporters to allocate preferences beyond the new legal requirement.[13] Even had they wanted to, the Progressives would have found difficulty in attacking the Nationalists and the Wearne group in view of the fact that they were receiving most of their campaign money from the Graziers' Association and, in all probability, from the National Party's finance committee, the Consultative Council. The F.S.A. was simply not wealthy enough to finance the party on its own; in 1920 it had requested the Farmers and Graziers' Co-operative Ltd to place a levy on its members and establish a political fund but the scheme was not put into operation.[14]

The most obvious effect of the December crisis had been to make the Progressive Party a country party, a change which the *Land* cartoonist celebrated by drawing a farmer hosing down a calf, labelled 'Progressive Party', which had just been rescued from the bog of 'Coalition' and 'City Interests'.[15] Except for two who ran unsuccessfully in Newcastle, all the Progressive candidates stood in rural electorates and there was a much higher proportion of farmers and graziers in the Progressive lists than in the rural corps of Nationalist and Labor candidates.[16] The election, held on 25 March 1922, resulted in the return of 41 Fuller-Wearne 'Coalitionists', 36 Labor men, 9 Progressives, 2 Independents, 1 Independent Coalitionist and 1 member of the Democratic (Catholic) Party. Country electors had not shown any marked preference for the Bruxner as against the Wearne Progressives; all the Wearne men were returned (with the sole exception of Macarthur Onslow, who was standing for a Sydney seat) and were in many cases supported by the

[13] See ibid., 23 Mar. 1922, pp. 5 and 6. Both Progressive and Nationalist advertisements advise an exchange of preferences where both parties are competing in the same constituency.

[14] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Reports*, 1920, pp. 40-1; 1921, p. 45. On the financial difficulties of the Progressive Party see the report by H. P. Williams published in the *Farmers' Advocate* (Melbourne), 5 Apr. 1923.

[15] *Land*, 27 Jan. 1922, p. 11.

[16] See B. D. Graham, 'The Political Strategies of the Australian Country Parties. From their Origins until 1929', Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1958, p. 339.

local F.S.A. and G.A. branches.[17] In general, the True Blue Progressives gained votes where no Wearne men were standing for re-election (as in Northern Tableland, Murrumbidgee and Cootamundra) and lost ground where they were (as in Oxley, Byron and Namoi).[18]

The issues raised during the December crisis now weighed heavily on Bruxner's small party, which was soon to find itself giving conditional support to a government led by Fuller. On what principles had the True Blues made their stand? Their prevailing concern at the time of the crisis had been with the problem of identity; they had opposed the coalition proposal, not as an inefficient way of influencing policy so much as the first step towards a merger in which the Progressive Party would lose its separate status and its special standing with country people.[19] During the resolution of the crisis, in January 1922, the True Blues had been concerned to reassert their rural identity and not to lay down lines of strategy. The contrast with the Victorian crisis of July-September 1921, in which considerations of strategy were uppermost, could not be greater. At the same time, however, the crisis had left the True Blues committed to the strategic principle that the best way for a country party (even one as anti-Labor as the Progressives) to influence policy was to support conservative governments for concessions without accepting cabinet posts. For quite different reasons, then, the New South Wales country party found itself in agreement with the Victorian party, and saddled with a strategy which it was to find thoroughly impractical.

Dr Earle Page and the Coalition Strategy

By 1922 the country party movement was losing direction. Disagreements about strategy had shaken nearly every one of the State parties and the leaders seemed unable to agree on what could be done to revive their followers' enthusiasm. Guidance came in the end from the Federal Country Party, which under Dr Earle Page was moving towards the idea of forming coalition agreements and electoral pacts with the National Party.

Earle Christmas Grafton Page was born in Grafton, New South Wales, on 8 August 1880, one of a family of three girls and eight boys. Educated at Sydney High School and at the Medical School of the University of Sydney from which he graduated in 1901, he was for a period on the staff of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital before taking up a general practice in Grafton. During World War I he served as a surgeon in France and Egypt, and on his return to Australia began to take an active interest in local politics. He used the *Grafton Examiner,*

[17] This was particularly the case in Namoi, where Wearne was most popular. See *S.M.H.*, 28 Jan., 13, 17 Feb. 1922.

[18] See Graham, op. cit., table on p. 342.

[19] See the statement by D. H. Drummond, *Land*, 17 Dec. 1921, cited by Ellis, op. cit., p. 63.

of which he had become part-owner in 1915, to publicize his schemes for establishing a hydro-electric project on the Clarence River, and, after becoming mayor of South Grafton in 1918, founded the North Coast Development League to press for the advancement of the region as a whole. The importance of the local support he had cultivated became clear when, at the federal election of December 1919, he won Cowper on his own resources with only the last-minute endorsement of the F.S.A. to help him.[20] At forty-one, Page was very much a political novice when he came to the House of Representatives in Melbourne; his set speeches were rambling and disorganized, punctuated by a refrain of 'y'see, y'see'. At the same time he had the intelligence, ambition and political sense to adapt himself quickly to the rough and tumble of parliamentary politics. He himself used to describe how in his first parliament, when Hughes attacked him, he would do nothing but chuckle, a response which infuriated Hughes.

Page took over from W. J. McWilliams of Tasmania as leader of the Federal Country Party on 5 April 1921, receiving every vote but one (his own) in an open ballot.[21] McWilliams, the party's first leader, had been appointed for a trial period of a year or a session, whichever finished first, so that his colleagues would have an opportunity of assessing the ability of other possible leaders,[22] and though he was an experienced politician, having been a member of the Tasmanian Assembly between 1893 and 1900 and of the federal House since 1903, he had failed to win the confidence of his colleagues.[23] Another possible candidate for the leadership had been Harry Gregory, from Western Australia, but his extreme views on the tariff issue had probably counted against him. Page, on the other hand, was not a man of strong opinions, and got along well with the majority of the party.

His task as leader was complicated by the fact that the Hughes government depended on the Country Party for support in critical parliamentary divisions, support which the Country Party did not always wish to provide. This had created difficulties on several occasions during the first session,[24] but the situation had become even more delicate in March 1921 when W. Fleming (Robertson, N.S.W.) had deserted the National Party for the Country Party, a change which left the government (with 38 supporters) open to defeat by a combination of the 25

[20] Sir Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon, The Inside Story of Forty Years of Australian Political Life*, pp. 1-49. See also the excellent sketch by Ulrich Ellis, *A History of the Australian Country Party*, pp. 320-8, and the obituary notice in the London *Times*, 20 Dec. 1961, p. 12, and *S.M.H.*, 21 Dec. 1961, p. 9.

[21] By his own account, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 66. See also the statement by Alexander Hay, *S.M.H.*, 8 Dec. 1922.

[22] Ellis, op. cit., p. 52.

[23] On McWilliams' career, see Hobart *Mercury*, 23 Oct. 1929, p. 10.

[24] See Ellis, op. cit., pp. 52-5, and Graham, op. cit., pp. 641-50.

Labor and 12 Country Party members (one Nationalist having been elected Speaker). At the Prime Minister's request, Page had given an assurance that the Country Party would not attack the government while Hughes was abroad attending the Imperial Conference,[25] but by the autumn he felt strong enough to demand a price for conditional support. When Sir Joseph Cook, the Acting Prime Minister, approached him with the request that the party truce be extended for a further period to enable Hughes to attend the Washington Disarmament Conference, Page refused to agree. Hughes was therefore forced to return to Australia and to send Senator George Pearce to Washington in his place.[26]

On 19 October 1921 Page moved in the House that the government's proposed expenditure for 1921-2 be reduced by £2,817,000, a motion which was rejected on the 27th by the narrow margin of 33 votes to 32.[27] The government would have been defeated but for the absence of one Labor member and one Nationalist who intended supporting the proposal, and had Alexander Hay of the Country Party not voted against his colleagues. There can be no doubt that Page was in earnest and that he was prepared to bring about a dissolution of Parliament; his alternative was the formation 'of a reconstructed Government drawn from the best elements of the House'.[28] Hughes realized this and tried to come to terms with the Country Party. According to Page, the Prime Minister approached him with an offer of portfolios and discussed various policy matters with him. In his autobiography he recalls that Hughes had undertaken to make a reduction of £500,000 in the current estimates and that he, Page, said that the Country Party wanted a free parliamentary discussion of the estimates, 'a rectification of soldiers' grievances and the termination of the War Service Homes scandal', and a constitutional convention.

> If he acceded to these requests, I told the Prime Minister, the Country Party would permit the passage of the Budget to enable him to take the House into recess.
>
> I insisted that we were not worried about portfolios, but wanted to see that these questions were cleared up before there was any consideration of forming a Government. But if the Government failed to do this the Country Party would inform the people of the Prime Minister's offer and their reasons for declining.[29]

[25] Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp. 66-8.

[26] Interview with Sir Earle Page, 7 Mar. 1956, Canberra. See also Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp. 68-9.

[27] *C.P.D.*, vol. 97, 19 Oct. 1921, p. 12043; 27 Oct. 1921, p. 12236. The Country Party now numbered thirteen, following the election of J.A.J. Hunter for the Queensland seat of Maranoa, at a by-election in July 1921.

[28] *S.M.H.*, 4 Nov. 1922.

[29] Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 70, based on a memorandum dictated by Page in October 1921 as a report to the Country Party.

Other evidence suggests that Hughes was most anxious to persuade the Country Party to join a coalition, and Page may even have given him grounds for hope. At any rate, by November 1921, the coalition proposal was being seriously considered. Hughes cleared the ground on the 10th by having all his ministers promise to hand in their resignations 'so as to give him . . . a free hand in reorganising the Government',[30] and on the following day he announced that a reduction of £500,000 would be made in the estimates.[31] Page reported to the Federal Country Party on the 24th that if Hughes insisted on a coalition the Country Party should be given three portfolios (the Treasury, Repatriation and one other), should insist on its right to meet separately and to contest as many seats as it wished at the next election, and should make sure that its policy demands (about repatriation, war service homes and a constitutional convention bill) were met beforehand. He said that both parties should approve any statement made by Hughes about the proposed coalition. Hughes is reported to have rejected these conditions and his final offer of three portfolios was turned down by a Country Party meeting on the 30th.[32] Both Gregory and Fleming claimed later to have refused portfolios which Hughes had offered them individually.[33] National Party members were appointed to vacancies on the reconstructed cabinet, announced on 21 December.

Did the Country Party refuse the Prime Minister's offer because it objected to coalitions on principle, or because it did not like the terms, or because Page and Gregory (whom Hughes said later were for accepting his proposal)[34] could not sway their colleagues? According to Page, the party's refusal stemmed from its objection to the government's policy[35] but this could hardly have been the only reason. A coalition would have been strongly opposed by the V.F.U. outside, and presumably by Percy Stewart inside the party, but there is no evidence that such resistance was an important factor. It may also be the case that the party had held out for more portfolios; three places, two of which were already reserved for Page and Gregory (deputy leader at this time), were hardly enough for a party of thirteen ambitious men. The fact remained that the Federal Country Party had given serious consideration to joining a coalition government and coming to terms with the National Party. The dangers and advantages of this course were highlighted by trends, not only in New South Wales, where the True Blue breakaway was in progress, but in Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania.

[30] Hughes Papers, Note of a Cabinet Meeting, 10 Nov. 1921.

[31] *C.P.D.*, vol. 97, 11 Nov. 1921, pp. 12707-9.

[32] Ellis, op. cit., p. 66, based on minutes of the Federal Country Party, 24 and 30 Nov. 1921.

[33] *Argus*, 24 Feb. 1922 (Gregory); ibid., 15, 24 Nov. 1922 (Fleming).

[34] Ibid., 27 Sept. 1922.

[35] Ibid., 29 Sept. 1922.

In 1922 the Western Australian Country Party was still a member of the coalition government which it had joined in June 1917 but the coalition agreement had not been confirmed and clarified when James Mitchell became Premier in May 1919. After 1919 the position became even worse; the parliamentary Country Party was practically reduced to the status of a ministerial faction; its leadership was divided and irresolute; its cabinet representatives held themselves responsible only to Mitchell and not at all to their party; and the parliamentary group refused to acknowledge its obligation to the Primary Producers' Association (P.P.A.), as the F.S.A. had been renamed in 1920. The P.P.A. president, Alex Monger, tried to persuade the parliamentary group to define the terms of its participation in the coalition government and to reassert its parliamentary independence. In September 1922 he proposed that the following principles should be observed: that the Country Party had the right to decide on its relationship with other parties; that any coalition arranged should be publicly recognized; that the Country Party was entitled to representation on a coalition cabinet in proportion to its numerical strength in the parliamentary alliance; that a Country Party member should be Deputy Premier if the Premier belonged to another party; that, where possible, portfolios directly affecting the primary industries should be held by Country Party members; that the leader of the Country Party should have the right to recommend members of his party for ministerial positions; and that the Country Party should be consulted about policy matters before legislation was brought before Parliament.[36]

This was a significant step. For the first time, a country party leader was spelling out one of the basic principles of future strategy: that a country party could and should join coalition governments providing the terms of its participation, its rights and privileges, were clearly set out beforehand. Monger was arguing in effect that separate identity and a coalition were compatible so long as sufficient safeguards had been provided. As we shall see in the next chapter, Monger's struggle with the parliamentarians had just begun, but the importance of his proposals was not lost on the leaders in the eastern States. Here was a way out.

In Queensland, meanwhile, the futility of a country party's identifying itself too closely with the National Party was being demonstrated. At the beginning of 1921, the Queensland Country Party consisted of several more or less autonomous parts; its main electoral organization, the Primary Producers' Union (P.P.U.), was in fact a federation of three pressure groups, the United Graziers' Association (U.G.A.), the Queensland Farmers' Union (Q.F.U.) and the United Cane Growers' Association (U.C.G.A.), but a system of party branches was also being formed in keeping with a scheme adopted at the annual meeting of the P.P.U. General Council on 14 January 1921. The parliamentary

[36] *Primary Producer* (Perth), 29 Sept. 1922.

group, twenty-one members strong, had been committed by its leader, W. J. Vowles, to work with the smaller National Party in opposing E. G. Theodore's Labor government. Both the Q.F.U. and the U.C.G.A. complained that the U.G.A., which supplied most of the party's funds, was encouraging the parliamentary party to persist in its anti-Labor policy without regard for agrarian interests and that the system of independent branches was being used to cut down the power of the farmers' associations within the movement.[37] Dissatisfaction amongst the rank-and-file of the U.C.G.A. and the Q.F.U. mounted ominously in the autumn of 1921, and a poll of the latter's branches showed that sixty-eight were for withdrawing from the P.P.U. and only sixteen against (sixty-nine had not replied).[38] By 1922, indeed, the two organizations were attached to the P.P.U. in nothing but a formal sense, and a special meeting of the P.P.U. General Council on 22 September 1922 resolved that they and the U.G.A. should be permitted to withdraw from the P.P.U. as of 1 January 1923.[39] Then the executive of the U.G.A., at a meeting on 9 and 10 November, decided to stop financing the party, which had in any case formed a comprehensive electoral alliance with the National Democratic Council and thus gained access to the funds of the National Union, the political finance committee of the Brisbane business world. It was taken for granted that the electoral alliance, having secured the defeat of the Labor government, would develop into a coalition agreement between the National and Country Parties, a course advocated by the party in October 1922. Early in 1923 an effort was made to absorb the Country Party into the United Party, the name given to the National Party at a Rockhampton conference on 25 and 26 January 1923;[40] some members did join the new party so that by May the Country Party's strength had fallen from 24 to 16.

By this stage, however, the group of parliamentarians known as the Country Party had already lost their identity, whatever they called themselves. The withdrawal of the Q.F.U. and the U.C.G.A. had left the party without firm organizational roots in the wheat lands of the Darling Downs or the sugar districts of Central Queensland; its financial independence had been forfeited by its use of National Union funds; and its policies in Parliament were indistinguishable from those of the United Party. The Labor government, meanwhile, had established a system of Primary Producers' Organizations within the framework of the Central Council of Agriculture and had promoted State-directed compulsory pools for the marketing of wheat, butter and

[37] *Graziers' Review* (Brisbane), 14 May 1921, pp. 107-8; *Producers' Review* (Toowoomba), 10 Feb. 1921, p. 5. See also Z. Abidin, 'The Origins and Development of the Queensland Country Party, 1909, 1932', M.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1958, pp. 72-118.

[38] *Producers' Review*, 10 July 1921, p. 64.

[39] *Brisbane Courier*, 23 Sept. 1922.

[40] *Graziers' Review*, 16 Nov. 1922, p. ix; Brisbane *Courier*, 11, 18, 20 Jan., 2 Mar., 13 Apr., 16 June, 1 Nov. 1922; 26, 27 Jan. 1923.

other primary produce.[41] There is evidence to suggest that the decline of the Q.F.U. was accompanied by the attraction of many Darling Downs farmers to the Producers' Organizations[42] but this did not lead directly to increased support for the Labor Party in the south-eastern electorates. For Country Party leaders in other States, however, the lessons of the Queensland experience were plain; to survive as an independent force, a country party had to ensure that co-operation with the Nationalists was not achieved at the expense of either agrarian support or financial self-sufficiency.

There were also morals to be drawn from the course pursued by the Tasmanian Country Party in 1922. In the State election of June, Country Party candidates were put forward by three allied groups, the Port Huon Co-operative Company, the Tasmanian Farmers, Stock-owners, and Orchardists' Association and the Primary Producers' Association, the latter sharing many features of the V.F.U.[43] During the election campaign, the party declared that it would co-operate with the National Party in Parliament, even to the extent of forming a coalition, and that under no circumstances would it support a Labor government.[44] It polled exceptionally well in the election, held under a system of proportional representation in five-member constituencies, and returned five candidates to the House of Assembly in which it held the balance between the government's following (twelve Nationalists and one Independent) and the twelve Labor members.[45] When

[41] See C. A. Bernays, *Queensland: Our Seventh Political Decade, 1920-1930*, pp. 198-200.

[42] See the *Producers' Review*, 10 July 1922, p. 9.

[43] Hobart *Mercury*, 1 Sept. 1921; 6 Apr. 1922; Launceston *Examiner*, 25 Jan., 16 Feb., 16, 18, 31 Mar., 3 Apr. 1922; *Farmers' Advocate*, 17, 24 Nov., 1, 8, 15, 29 Dec. 1921.

[44] Hobart *Mercury*, 7 Apr. 1922; Launceston *Examiner*, 3 Apr., 27, 31 May 1922.

[45] The following were the Country Party candidates.

Electorate	*T.F.S.O.A.*	*P.P.A.*	*Port Huon Co-op.*
Darwin	J. T. H. Whitsitt	*R. Franks	
	*E. Hobbs	C. A. Dunning	
		J. F. Wright	
Wilmot	*E. H. Blyth	*A. W. Bendall	
	W. C. Gowan	A. T. Lade	
Franklin	W. H. Dixon		*J. P. Piggott
	J. A. Newman		B. J. Pearsall
Bass		R. Murphy	

Those starred were elected.

J. T. H. Whitsitt classed himself as an Independent but was endorsed by the T.F.S.O.A.

The Country Party polled 28·63 per cent of the valid votes in Darwin, 22·48 per cent in Franklin, 22·40 per cent in Wilmot, and 6·13 per cent in Bass.

Parliament met, the Country Party combined with a faction of the National Party to bring about the resignation of W. H. Lee's government; its leader, E. F. B. Blyth, was then included as Minister for Lands and Mines in the new ministry formed by J. B. Hayes.[46]

Each in his own way, the leaders of the Western Australian, Queensland and Tasmanian Country Parties were trying to break out of the strategic impasse of the years 1920 and 1921. At the federal level, Dr Earle Page was also looking for a fresh approach, but though he was thinking in terms of a coalition agreement he was not anxious to hurry into an arrangement with Hughes. As he correctly estimated, the National Party itself was in transition, and if the Country Party were able to exploit the obvious divisions in the former, its own bargaining position would be greatly strengthened. Page plainly expected that the conservatives in the National Party were on the point of ousting Hughes and his ex-Labor colleagues from power, and he probably envisaged the Country Party and the conservatives working together in a new situation,[47] perhaps with himself as Prime Minister.

Indeed Hughes was losing his grip. The main source of his party's election finance, the National Union of Melbourne, reflected the concern of its contributors with the government's post-war policies; pastoralists still remembered the meat-price-fixing regulations of 1918; graziers, importers and mining companies disliked the increased duties imposed by the Massy Greene Tariff of 1921; the Employers' Federation and the Chamber of Manufactures, while they benefited from the increased tariff protection, disapproved of Hughes's defence of the arbitration system; and conservatives generally accused his government of extravagance, of an undue interest in financing such state enterprises as the Geelong Woollen Mills and the Commonwealth Shipping Line, and a belief in a greater measure of federal economic control (as indicated by the 1919 referendum proposals). At two meetings of the Union, the first in November 1921 and the second in October 1922, the government was criticized on many of these counts. There is reason to suppose that it was partly on the insistence of the former meeting that Hughes chose S. M. Bruce, an advocate of retrenchment, as his Treasurer during the cabinet reconstruction of November-December 1921.[48] Inside the parliamentary party, also, Hughes found his critics on the increase. Most formidable of these was W. A. Watt, who had resigned from the cabinet in June 1920 after a quarrel with Hughes. Others were Melbourne members such as G. A. Maxwell (Fawkner), F. H. Francis (Henty) and R. A. Best (Kooyong). The

[46] See Hobart *Mercury*, 11, 12 Aug. 1922; *Tasmania: Journals and Papers of Parliament, 1922-23*, vol. 86, *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 9 Aug. 1922, p. 22.

[47] See his speeches at Townsville (Townsville *Daily Bulletin*, 26 May 1922, included amongst the Hughes Papers), and at the June 1922 Conference of the A.F.F.O. (*Argus*, 15 June 1922).

[48] On the meeting of October 1922, see the *Age*, 27 Oct. 1922.

minutes of the party for this period positively smoulder with discontent.[49]

Page was well placed to exploit these divisions now that another federal election was near. He was reported to have conferred early in October with Watt, Best, and H. E. Pratten, the Nationalist M.H.R. for Parramatta and a former president of the Chamber of Manufactures, and to have formed a separate understanding with the Australian Legion, a Melbourne organization which endorsed the Country Party's platform and announced that it would support candidates who would 'co-operate with the Country party in the new Parliament'. Later in the month, both the Country Party and the Legion reached an agreement with a third group, the Liberal Union, about a joint platform and combined support for several candidates, but the Union withdrew from the arrangement in November.[50] Members of the Federal Country Party were clearly banking on these and similar agreements to create an open situation after the elections.

'A lot of old Liberals are going back to Parliament', said W. G. Gibson, the Country Party member for Corangamite, 'and . . . an understanding would be reached that they could work unitedly for the general welfare of the Commonwealth, and administer the affairs of the country wisely and economically.'[51] According to a Country Party record, Austin Chapman, the National Party member for Eden-Monaro, had given an undertaking that if returned 'he would be one of the Liberal wing which would put into and maintain in office the Leader of the Country Party'.[52]

The campaign opened with policy speeches by Hughes, Page and the Labor leader, Matthew Charlton. A comparison between those of Hughes and Page showed that the Country Party leader had taken a very conservative line, despite the radical demands of organizations such as the V.F.U. Whereas Hughes defended compulsory arbitration,

[49] See L. F. Crisp, 'New Light on the Trials and Tribulations of W. M. Hughes, 1920-1922', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, x, 37, November 1961, pp. 86-91.

[50] See *Argus*, 3, 6, 10, 17, 20 Oct., 13, 15 Nov. 1922. The Liberal Union (see the two latter references) apparently regarded itself as a rival to the National Union and, unlike the Australian Legion, was interested in a straightforward reconstitution of the former Liberal Party rather than a resorting of the non-Labor forces around the Country Party. The Union's president was C. G. Merritt, chairman of the Victorian Chamber of Agriculture, and T. R. Ashworth, president of the Victorian Employers' Federation, was a member of its executive.

I should like to thank Mrs Kim Morgan, of the Australian National University, who supplied me with much of the information on which the above account is based.

[51] *Farmers' Advocate*, 12 Oct. 1922. Cf. statement by McWilliams, Hobart *Mercury*, 24 Nov. 1922, p. 683.

[52] Report by H. P. Williams, *The Australian Country Party Minute Book*, 4 Oct. 1922, p. 3.

Page favoured a voluntary system of industrial commissions; although Hughes defended those state enterprises which had been established during and after the war, Page declared for private enterprise and 'the strictest limitation of Government enterprise to developmental works and public utilities' and suggested that the Commonwealth Shipping Line be the subject of a Royal Commission; Hughes promised tariff assistance to the sugar industry, financial assistance to voluntary wheat pools, and the stabilization of the dairying and cattle industries, but Page said that voluntary co-operative pools should not require government aid.[53]

Once more the assorted electoral organizations of the Country Party swung into line. At the election, held on 16 December 1922, the V.F.U. again returned a contingent of five members; although one of its seats (Grampians) had been eliminated in the 1922 redistribution of federal electorates, it succeeded in winning Gippsland from the Nationalists and retained its hold on Wimmera, Echuca, Indi and Corangamite. In New South Wales, the F.S.A. and the Graziers' Association formed a council to manage their campaign; in the north, Page again won Cowper, Roland Green defeated the Nationalist Minister, Massy Greene, in the Richmond contest, and V. C. Thompson, Secretary of the Northern New State League, defeated Alexander Hay, the party's black sheep, in the contest for New England; in the south, W. W. Killen, the immediate past-president of the F.S.A., wrested Riverina from an established National Party member, J. M. Chanter. The Western Australian P.P.A. had no difficulty in returning Prowse for the new division of Forrest while Gregory was returned unopposed in Swan. In South Australia, the F.S.A.'s candidates for Barker and Wakefield polled only 14·2 and 20·4 per cent of the primary votes respectively in two closely fought triangular contests, but in Tasmania the three farmers' associations (see p. 181) returned J. T. H. Whitsitt for Darwin and L. Atkinson, a former Nationalist, for Wilmot; McWilliams, however, was defeated in the Franklin poll. In Queensland, the Country Party's refusal to support the government's policy of affording the sugar industry a high level of tariff protection had affected its chances, but J. A. J. Hunter was returned for the predominantly grazing electorate of Maranoa. Wienholt did not stand for re-election in Moreton.[54]

The election produced the following situation in the new House of Representatives: the government's strength (26 Nationalists, 3 South Australian Liberals, and 1 Independent) was matched by an opposition of 29 Labor members, and holding the balance of power were 14 Country Party men and 2 Liberals—J. G. Latham (who had won Kooyong on behalf of the Australian Legion) and W. A. Watt. Page's pipe-dream of the Liberal resurgence had failed to materialize and Hughes had retained his hold on office. The Country Party leader

[53] See *Argus*, 25, 27 Oct. 1922.

[54] On the Queensland campaign, see Graham, op. cit., pp. 686-9.

conferred briefly with Pratten and Bruce, but otherwise kept to the background.[55] That a coalition was still within the bounds of possibility was suggested by Sir Joseph Carruthers, in a letter which he wrote to Hughes on 2 January 1923, reporting that Austin Chapman had already talked with Page. 'He said that silence was the best course for Page & he (Chapman) intended to talk matters over with me. Page & he discussed a Coalition with you and the former said you had attacked him rather bitterly in the Elections but he was impressed with the view that a reconciliation was desirable in the public interest.'[56] On 4 January Page went to Queensland for a fortnight's holiday[57] and made no further statements about politics in Melbourne.

On 16 January 1923 separate meetings of the Federal National and Country Parties were held in Melbourne, and it was taken for granted that the two main subjects for discussion were the Prime Minister's future and the prospects for a coalition government. The National Party meeting, having passed a vote of confidence in Hughes, appointed six managers (Hughes, Bruce, E. K. Bowden and Senators T. W. Crawford, E. D. Millen and J. D. Millen) to negotiate with the Country Party 'to arrive at some modus vivendi by which the King's Government [may] be carried on'. The Country Party accepted this invitation and appointed Page, W. G. Gibson and Percy Stewart as its managers.[58] Although the National Party members then dispersed, the Country

[55] *Argus*, 28, 29 Dec. 1922.

[56] Letter from Sir Joseph Carruthers to W. M. Hughes, 2 Jan. 1923, Hughes Papers.

[57] Brisbane *Courier*, 5 Jan. 1923.

[58] *Argus*, 17 Jan., 2 Feb. 1923.

On the negotiations of this period see Ellis, *Australian Country Party*, pp. 90-9 (particularly valuable for its references to the minutes of the Federal Country Party, which have now been lost), and Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp. 90-101.

In the Hughes Papers is a sheaf of documents relating to the managers' discussions. They are: (a) a letter from Hughes to Page, 16 Jan. 1923; (b) a memorandum presented by Page to the Nationalist Managers on 19 Jan.; (c) a memorandum presented by Hughes to the Country Party Managers on 23 Jan.; (d) a reply from Page on the same day; (e) a second memorandum from Hughes on 23 Jan.; (f) a further memorandum from Page on 24 Jan.; (g) two typed foolscap sheets comparing the National and Country Parties' election speeches. (These may have been used during the discussions to clear up points of policy.); (h) a single typed sheet explaining the exchange of memoranda; (i) five sheets of typed foolscap numbered from 2 to 6 which appear to be the transcript of Hughes's report to the National Party on 31 Jan. Copies of documents (a) to (f) were given by Page to the newspapers (see *Argus*, 2 Feb. 1923, p. 9), and most are reproduced in full in Ellis and/or Page in the pages cited above.

The writer discussed the negotiations with Sir Earle Page (Canberra, 22 Feb., 7 Mar. and 9 May 1956), Sir John Latham (Melbourne, 20 Aug. 1956), and Lord Bruce (Canberra, 3 Dec. 1957).

Party men stayed on, presumably to provide moral support and advice to Page and his two colleagues.

The party managers conferred on five occasions between 17 and 19 January, during which time the Country Party also met frequently. When the latter assembled on the morning of the 17th to work out its course of action, Page did not waste any time; he 'tentatively suggested that Hughes should be informed at the outset that they could not accept him as Prime Minister and that, therefore, any negotiation should be conducted with his successor'.[59] Guided by John Latham, the Liberal member for Kooyong, who was present by invitation, the members took their hurdles one at a time; first, they decided that the party would not 'support or co-operate' with any government of which Hughes was Prime Minister; then, by seven votes to six, they resolved not even to accept a ministry of which he was a member.[60] But they did not refuse to allow their managers to attend their first conference with the Nationalists, set down for the afternoon, and here Latham's hand may also be seen. Had the Country Party refused to negotiate at this stage, it would have strengthened the Prime Minister's position and lessened the chances that his rivals in the National Party would be able to undermine his power. From their point of view, a reasonable and conciliatory Country Party was worth far more than one which appeared to the public as if it were putting its vendetta against Hughes before the good of the country. Latham's importance at this stage of the proceedings was considerable. An old boy of Scotch College and a former lecturer at the University of Melbourne, he had attended the Imperial Conference in 1918 with the Minister for the Navy, had been Assistant Secretary to the British Empire Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, and had been appointed K.C. in 1922. Having fought the recent election on the slogan 'Hughes must go', he now addressed himself single-mindedly to the task of ensuring that that was in fact what happened, persuading the Country Party that patience and guile would pay more dividends than brashness in the bargaining situation which was just opening up.

The only records of what transpired at the managers' conferences are highly coloured and biased, but it is important that some attempt at reconstruction should be made.[61] When the first discussion opened, the Country Party's delegates reported that their party would not support or co-operate with any government led by or including Hughes. The Prime Minister said that he would not stand in the way of agreement but that the National Party had to be consulted on this matter; he

[59] According to Ellis, *Countryman* (Syd.), April 1956. This account is presumably based on the Minutes of the Federal Country Party.

[60] Ellis, *Australian Country Party*, p. 92. Based on the Minutes of the Federal Country Party, 17 Jan. 1923.

[61] The following paragraphs are based, except where indicated, on documents (b) to (f) and (i). (All quotations from these are in keeping with the texts of the copies included amongst the Hughes Papers.)

also insisted that the Country Party should discuss questions of policy and the means of providing 'stable' government, either by coalition or by one of the parties supporting the other one in power as a minority ministry. According to Hughes, a preamble was drawn up which stated that, 'Subject to the Nationalist party agreeing to a change in the Prime Ministership, the Country party agrees to co-operate with the Nationalists in such steps as may be necessary to give effect to the following'; presumably various policy points were to be appended.[62] Hughes's statement suggests that this preamble was agreed to on the afternoon of the 18th, but well before this the Country Party's managers had been drawn into deep waters and it is not surprising to find that, on the morning of the 18th, at Latham's suggestion, the party had laid down principles to guide them. It was agreed that 'Portfolios are not a condition precedent to negotiations'; that no coalition should involve 'the loss of the identity of the Country Party'; that the party was prepared 'to give external support to an approved government with a satisfactory programme', and that if necessary 'the party is prepared, subject to a satisfactory agreement as to personnel and programme of the government, to join in forming a composite government with a non-socialist party'.[63] The last was the most significant point, but it should not be taken to mean that the Country Party had already made a basic decision to accept the coalition strategy; at this stage it was probably wholly absorbed in working out its bargaining position. Questions of strategy were not considered with any seriousness, it would appear, until after the event.

Press reports at the time and statements made later by Hughes indicate that at the closing stages of the conferences the Country Party delegates were obliged to discuss the feasibility of various kinds of coalitions and of either a Country Party or Nationalist government, and that some consideration was given to the tariff, financial policy and the arbitration system amongst other things.[64] Hughes was not only gaining time, he was forcing the Country Party to agree in advance to accept responsibility for the acts and security of the next government, whether it was led by him or not. Not only were Page and his managers being placed on the defensive, they were in danger of losing their most powerful bargaining counters. The time had come to break off the discussions. On 19 January Page sent Hughes a memorandum, which Latham had helped him draft, setting down the Country Party's view of the state of play and, in keeping with a suggestion made by Hughes, offering to form a ministry 'from the non-Labour side of the House, to carry out common lines of policy, the immediate programme being framed by such a ministry when formed'. In the memorandum,

[62] Statement by Hughes, *Argus*, 2 Feb. 1923, p. 10.

[63] Ellis, op. cit., p. 92, based on Minutes of the Federal Country Party, 18 Jan. 1923.

[64] See *Argus*, 19 Jan. 1923, and the statement by Hughes, ibid., 2 Feb. 1923, p. 10.

Page reviewed the managers' talks as he saw them: he claimed that the Country Party had not asked for cabinet portfolios as the price of co-operation but had been prepared to support a National Party ministry with an acceptable policy, provided it did not contain Hughes; that Hughes had rejected this offer and had proposed that the Country Party form a minority government, which he, Page, in his turn had refused to do. On the evening of the 19th, having received no reply, he wrote to Hughes again asking that the Nationalists submit counter proposals.[65] Instead, Hughes wrote to him on the 23rd, presenting quite a different version of the bargaining; the Country Party, he said, had insisted that Page should be the Prime Minister of any coalition government formed and that five of the ministers, including one honorary minister, should belong to the Country Party. In this letter the Prime Minister repeated his delegation's assurance that, subject to an agreement on policy and an undertaking from the Country Party to support any government that might be formed, it would recommend to its party five alternatives—a National Party ministry, the same strengthened by Country Party members, a Country Party ministry, the same strengthened by some Nationalists, and a 'composite' ministry formed by members of both parties. He again undertook to resign if an arrangement could be reached which would ensure stable government.

Page replied on the same day to say that the Country Party wanted 'such proportion and distribution of portfolios as will give the Country Party power in any composite Ministry as great as its responsibility'. He asked for a written statement declaring whether or not the Nationalist managers would 'accept and recommend' to the National Party the Country Party's claim that it would neither support nor co-operate with any government containing Hughes, and inquired about what assurances of support the Nationalists envisaged for the governments mentioned and what form of composite government they would recommend to their party. In his second letter of 23 January, Hughes said that while the Nationalist managers did not accept the Country Party's claim to the Prime Ministership and four other cabinet posts, neither did they reject the proposal; they considered that it might wait until an agreement about policy and assurances of support had been reached. As an alternative, they suggested that the Country Party be allocated five of twelve places in a coalition cabinet, the Prime Minister being chosen by a ballot of the members of both parties. Amongst other points, Hughes mentioned that assurances of support meant backing the government in the House and particularly on votes of censure, and that his managers would recommend to the National Party 'any form of composite Government'.

On the 24th, in the final memorandum of this series, Page declared in effect that there was no point in continuing negotiations unless Hughes resigned unconditionally and another National Party leader

[65] Ellis, op. cit., p. 94.

were appointed. If this condition were met, the Country Party would be prepared to support a Nationalist government, or to join a composite ministry, or to have Page form a ministry of his own 'from the non-Labour side of the House'. In his autobiography, Page claimed that he instructed his secretary to tell Hughes that he would publish the whole correspondence on his arrival in Sydney on 25 January, but that he agreed later to defer publication until after the National Party had met on the 31st.[66]

There is reason to believe that Page had been less than frank in these exchanges, probably because he and Latham had intended them for publication all along. Newspaper accounts at the time tally with the Prime Minister's charge that Page had claimed the Prime Ministership and four other cabinet places for the Country Party[67] and, as the *Argus* noted, Page's offer in his letter of the 24th to form his own ministry 'certainly indicates that he must have received assurances of support from certain Nationalist members. It is known that in such a contingency several members of the Nationalist Party would join Dr. Page, and it is likely that a further attempt would be made to induce Mr. Watt to join the combination.'[68] Apart from suggestions that Page may have calculated on becoming Prime Minister in the event of Hughes's deposition, the memoranda also reveal a desire on the part of the National Party to make the Country Party accept governmental responsibility, either by taking posts in a coalition cabinet or by supporting a Nationalist government on the basis of a policy agreement; in other words, to make it drop its pretence of being either a third or a centre party and to admit that its destiny was partnership with the National Party in an anti-Labor alliance. On the Country Party side, Page's letters would suggest that he had no further hesitations about contemplating his party's accepting posts in a coalition, and that his co-managers, Gibson and Stewart, had raised no serious objections to this possibility. Gibson's acquiescence is not surprising, but Percy Stewart's apparent change of heart does require some explanation. How had the Mallee's radical leader come to accept the coalition principle, which his followers in the V.F.U. regarded as the antithesis of independence? Stewart's closeness to Page may be part of the answer: at that time he was chairman of directors of the *Sunraysia Daily*, one of the main Mallee newspapers, which he, Page and R. D. Elliott had purchased a few years earlier,[69] and Page may have already given him an assurance of a cabinet place. Later Stewart claimed that he had agreed to accept the coalition idea on the understanding that there would

[66] Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp. 95-6.

[67] *Argus*, 20, 24 Jan. 1923. Thomas Paterson, the Country Party member for Gippsland, said that Page had been authorized by the party to discuss a composite ministry with the Nationalist managers on the understanding that he should have the Prime Ministership (*Farmers' Advocate*, 15 Feb. 1923).

[68] *Argus*, 25 Jan. 1923, p. 7.

[69] Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 54.

not be an electoral alliance with the Nationalists,[70] but it should have been clear that the first would lead inevitably to the second. Whatever his reasons, the fact remains that the Country Party had come, however incidentally, to the course which led to its adopting the coalition strategy. Page had taken the bit between his teeth.

After 24 January it became a question of which man, Page or Hughes, could retain the confidence of his party longer. Page had to face pressure from two directions—from conservatives in the Country Party who feared that the Labor Party might take advantage of the situation,[71] and from the V.F.U.'s radicals, whose case had already been put by the *Farmers' Advocate*.[72] But these problems were nothing compared with those confronting Hughes in the National Party, where Pratten, Francis, and Maxwell amongst others were quietly working to bring about his downfall. At first it appeared as though Hughes had preserved much of his authority, for when the National Party met on 31 January it rejected by 34 votes to 4 the Country Party's proposal that the Prime Minister's resignation should be made a condition of further negotiations; but at the same time it adopted (by 25 votes to 5) another resolution advocating that there should be further discussions aimed at 'a working alliance upon a fair basis by which stable government can be obtained and assured'.[73] Had the party really wanted to support Hughes it would surely have stopped dealing with the Country Party, which would then have had the responsibility of defeating the government by public vote when Parliament met. As it was, at a further meeting on 1 February, a proposal to appoint another team of managers from which Hughes would be excluded was defeated by 25 votes to 14, the latter figure suggesting that many who had abstained in the divisions of the previous day were now prepared openly to oppose the Prime Minister.[74] Meanwhile, the resolutions of the 31st had been conveyed to Stewart and Gibson and through them to Page in Sydney, after which Gibson had sent Hughes a letter repeating Page's assertion that the Country Party 'cannot in any way support a Government containing the present Prime Minister, and that until his retirement is unconditionally guaranteed further negotiations are useless'.[75] In Sydney, Page had released the January correspondence to the evening papers.[76] Near midnight on the same day, Hughes told a meeting of ministers that he would hand in his commission and would

[70] *Countryman* (Melbourne), 8 Aug. 1924; *Argus*, 7 Nov. 1928.

[71] For example, Harry Gregory had had misgivings from the outset (*S.M.H.*, 4 Jan. 1923).

[72] *Farmers' Advocate*, 18 Jan. 1923.

[73] *Argus*, 1 Feb. 1923.

[74] Ibid., 2 Feb. 1923, p. 9. See also J. T. Lang, *The Great Bust*, p. 37.

[75] Letter from W. G. Gibson to W. M. Hughes, 1 Feb. 1923, cited in *Argus*, 2 Feb. 1923, p. 9.

[76] Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 96.

advise the Governor-General, Lord Forster, to send for Bruce.[77] On the afternoon of 2 February, Lord Forster asked Bruce whether 'he could form an administration which would satisfy his Excellency as to the prospects of its stability'.[78]

Bruce immediately got in touch with Page, who had returned to Grafton, and asked him to come to Melbourne for talks. On the afternoon of 6 February, Page reached Melbourne on the Sydney Express, which stopped specially at North Melbourne station, from where he was borne in R. D. Elliott's motor car to Bruce's flat at Toorak, a display of conspicuous discretion which delighted reporters.[79] Page came to see Bruce several times during the 6th and 7th—on one of these occasions Bruce was forced reluctantly to set aside an Edgar Wallace thriller he was reading[80]—and finally, at 11 p.m. on the 7th, it was announced that Bruce had been commissioned to form a government.[81] Its members had virtually been chosen beforehand and the new ministry, a coalition of the two parties, was sworn in on the morning of 9 February. Bruce was Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, and Page was Treasurer, the other Country Party members being P. G. Stewart (Works and Railways), W. G. Gibson (Postmaster-General), Llewelyn Atkinson (Vice-President of the Executive Council) and Senator R. V. Wilson (Honorary Minister), who was also to act as Assistant to Austin Chapman, the Minister for Trade and Customs. The remaining Nationalist Ministers were G. F. Pearce (Home and Territories), Sir Littleton Groom (Attorney-General), E. K. Bowden (Defence) and Senator T. W. Crawford (Honorary Minister).

The substance of the agreement between Bruce and Page has always been a matter of dispute amongst historians. The only formal agreement, set down in Bruce's handwriting, specified the general terms of the coalition relationship: it declared that the identity of each party would be maintained; that a composite ministry of eleven members was to be formed, the positions of Treasurer, Works and Railways, Postmaster-General, Vice-President of the Executive Council and one Honorary Ministership being allocated to the Country Party and those of External Affairs, Customs, Attorney-General, Defence, Home and Territories, and a second Honorary Ministership to the National Party; that Page would, after the Prime Minister, take precedence in the cabinet, would speak on the latter's behalf in his absence, and would be acting Prime Minister if such an appoint-

[77] *Argus*, 3 Feb. 1923, p. 25, and statement by Bruce, *S.M.H.*, 21 Sept. 1929, p. 17.

[78] *Age*, 3 Feb. 1923, p. 15. The quotation is taken from the text of a statement by the Governor-General's secretary. Paterson later alleged that Lord Forster insisted that Bruce obtain a promise of support from the Country Party (*Farmers' Advocate*, 15 Feb. 1923).

[79] *Argus*, 7 Feb. 1923, p. 19.

[80] Interview with Lord Bruce, Canberra, 3 Dec. 1957.

[81] *Argus*, 7, 8 Feb. 1923.

ment became necessary; and that the government would be known as the Bruce-Page Ministry.[82]

The two leaders discussed not only the number of portfolios to be given to each party but also the number of cabinet places. Page claimed in his autobiography[83] that he first asked for six Country Party places in a cabinet of twelve, that Bruce objected and that the six to five ratio was adopted as a compromise. A contemporary account of the bargaining by Thomas Paterson, the Country Party member for Gippsland, maintained that the first offer made by Bruce was one of four to eight, and that Page countered with his six to six proposal. 'The agreement on six to five', Paterson added, 'would mean that the Country Party's Cabinet representatives could only be overruled by the Prime Minister's personal vote. A man endeavouring to hold a team together would hesitate to use it.'[84] Such rather ambiguous allusions formed the basis for a suggestion that Bruce and Page had agreed that a cabinet division on party lines should constitute a negative vote, but Page has denied that any such agreement was made.[85] The two leaders' interest in numbers as well as portfolios may have sprung from a concern to make enough places for their followers, and Page may have been anxious to convey the appearance of a balanced cabinet to his outside supporters. But it should be remembered that Page had been only three years in Parliament and that Bruce had been in the cabinet for only a year: the possibility that they envisaged cabinet divisions on party lines should not be discarded until all the evidence is before us.

As for other aspects of the agreement, it was laid down that the two parliamentary parties should continue to meet separately, and that if Page resigned the Country Party ministers should withdraw from the cabinet with him. The two men also decided what departments were most appropriate for their respective ministers, each leader selecting men from his party to fill the posts with the proviso that each should have a veto over the other's choice (although the veto was not exercised). They also recommended that, if the coalition survived, 'then we would fight the next election as a Government team with immunity for sitting members. This we both regarded as the most desirable procedure, though we knew that we could not

[82] Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp. 99-100.

[83] For the full account of his talks with Bruce, see ibid., pp. 97-100, on which the following paragraphs are largely based.

[84] *Farmers' Advocate*, 15 Feb. 1923.

[85] On the negative vote question, see F. Alexander in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, vol. VII, Part I, p. 607. In an interview with the writer at Canberra, on 22 Feb. 1956, Sir Earle Page said he did not recall any division on party lines and L. F. Crisp reports that cabinet decisions are rarely taken to the vote (*The Parliamentary Government of the Commonwealth of Australia*, p. 203).

bind our party organizations. Nevertheless we agreed to recommend such a course strongly to them.'[86]

Questions of policy were undoubtedly discussed. Bruce has said that the ground covered included soldier settlement, financial relations between Commonwealth and State governments, aid for primary producers, and the tariff; at the same time, he denies that there was any formal agreement—it was 'a broad understanding on the general lines of policy'.[87] Page has been more guarded in his remarks on this subject, but he told the writer that he and Bruce had agreed that if a primary producers' representative were appointed to the Tariff Board, its recommendations should be accepted as government policy.[88] Bruce and Page obviously knew each other's views so well that there was no need for them to draw up a written list of agreed policies, but that they appreciated the need for continued consultation is shown by a letter from Bruce to Page suggesting that all major policy questions should be presented to cabinet only after they had been discussed between themselves.[89]

Only when the sequence of crises and negotiations is set out at this length, and the story of Page's first two years as Country Party leader told alongside it, does the extraordinary energy and political recklessness of the man emerge. He and Latham were the two most responsible for arranging Hughes's downfall, even though they almost precipitated a major political crisis in the process, but once this was done, Page had the good sense not to outrage his Country Party colleagues. When he described the members of the first Federal Country Party in his autobiography, he wrote of them as 'characters' whom he remembered because of their background, the way they spoke in the House, the things they did; he was a shrewd judge of their political natures, and held his party together because he knew how to persuade and enthuse them—not because he inspired devotion.

Nothing showed his skill in leadership as much as his efforts, in the months following the formation of the coalition, to persuade the Country Party movement to accept it. The Federal Country Party meeting on the afternoon of 9 February was a lively occasion at which several members criticized Page for not having consulted them earlier; Killen and Thompson, indeed, told the House later that they had not favoured a coalition.[90] But there was no heart in the pro-

[86] Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 98.

[87] Interview at Canberra, 3 Dec. 1957.

[88] Interview at Canberra, 22 Feb. 1956. A primary producers' representative was appointed to the Tariff Board in 1924. See R. C. Mills, 'The Tariff Board of Australia', *Economic Record*, III, May 1927, p. 67.

[89] S. Encel, *Cabinet Government in Australia*, p. 223. The letter was shown to Dr Encel by Mr Ulrich Ellis.

[90] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1923, p. 45; *C.P.D.*, vol. 102, 8 Mar. 1923, pp. 221 and 273-4.

test; a motion emphasizing the need for the party to preserve its separate identity was adopted and Gregory's proposal for appointing three managers to discuss policy with the Nationalists was rejected.[91] Stewart, the only man who might have created trouble, had accepted a portfolio. Most of the State organizations and parties endorsed the federal arrangement without demur. There was some soul-searching in New South Wales, where the Progressives had, fourteen months earlier, broken with Wearne for doing what Page had just done in federal politics. Bruxner suggested rather lamely that the federal pact was a better bargain than the one made by Wearne in December 1921 and that it contained better guarantees that the Country Party's separate identity would be preserved.[92]

The V.F.U.'s radicals were harder to win over. Throughout February 1923, the *Farmers' Advocate* attacked the coalition on the grounds that it would compromise the party's principles and policy objectives, maintaining that Page should not have committed the party to such a step without its prior consent or without the approval of a special conference of the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation. The V.F.U.'s president at this time was Thomas Paterson, who since his election to the House in 1922 had already drawn close to Page. He rallied the organization's conservative and moderate groups behind the thesis, set out in an article which he published in the *Advocate* on 15 February, that the federal party had had no choice other than to join a coalition, and that it could always withdraw if its interests were threatened. On 19 March he persuaded the Union's Central Council to adopt a resolution declaring that the ministry should be given 'a fair chance to make good', and the same resolution was adopted on the 20th by the V.F.U. annual conference. Albert Dunstan led the radicals in making a noisy but ineffective protest. Stewart refused to take sides and called for faith in Page. 'Time was the essence of the contract. Their leader had to take responsibilities. That was a Leader's function. If he were not prepared to drive a bargain and stand or fall by the result he would not be leader of the party.'[93]

The acceptance of the Bruce-Page agreement by the country parties signified a number of things—confidence in Page's political skill, an unwillingness on the part of farmers' organizations to interfere in high politics, and a concern to give the coalition a trial. But it was also acknowledged that Page had pioneered a way of ensuring that participation in a coalition alliance would not threaten the parliamentary Country Party with absorption or loss of status. As Monger's ultimatum to the Western Australian Country Party in Sep-

[91] *Argus*, 10 Feb. 1923, pp. 29-30. W.A. P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1927, p. 43.

[92] *Land* (Sydney), 16 Feb. 1923, p. 11.

[93] *Farmers' Advocate*, 8, 15 Feb., 22 Mar. 1923. Stewart quote from latter reference.

tember 1922 had suggested, the techniques were to insist that the party's rights be clearly defined and respected; that the Country Party leader be either the first or the second minister; that he choose the ministers of his party and have a say in allocating their portfolios; and that the allegiance of Country Party ministers should be dual, to the first minister as the constitutional head of state and to the Country Party leader as their chief patron. In Parliament, the Country Party should sit apart and hold separate meetings; in elections, it should be accorded a sphere of influence and granted a modest growing space. In policy matters, there should be some provision for consultation and bargaining as between parties. Once its logic had been worked out and understood, the coalition strategy gained general acceptance amongst Country Party men, except in Victoria where the conditional-support strategy of badgering governments from the corner benches became the special preserve of the V.F.U.'s radicals.

The coalition strategy was for the country parties an innovation of the utmost importance. It supplied them with a method of gaining access to fields of policy essential to their supporting interests but at the same time left them a relatively independent unit in the party system. It was evolved to meet Country Party needs by several men, but principally by Page and Monger. However, theirs was essentially a rediscovery of an earlier tradition which had produced such carefully balanced coalitions as the Reid-McLean Ministry of 1904-5, when a similar division of portfolios, cabinet places and influence was achieved between the federal Free Trade and Protectionist Parties. These arrangements have been called 'composite ministries' rather than coalitions, and Encel has suggested that their distinguishing features are that ministers remain responsible to their individual parties, that each party retains its separate identity, and that the Prime Minister's or Premier's choice of his cabinet is restricted by the Country Party's right to nominate an agreed number of ministers.[94] Although this distinction should be treated with caution since a great many coalitions have these features, it does serve to highlight the special quality of the non-Labor coalitions which date from the Bruce-Page Ministry. The latter's formation is not only one of the most important points in our present story, but a significant landmark in the history of contemporary Australian politics.

[94] See Encel, op. cit., pp. 196-202, especially p 197. See also F. W. Eggleston, *Reflections of an Australian Liberal*, 2nd edition, p. 105.

6

The Coalition Strategy on Trial, 1923-1925

The first Country Party members of Parliament had soon found that there were serious limitations to the strategy of influencing government policy by public bargaining rather than by joining coalition ministries. They found that most policy decisions were not made on the floor of the House but in cabinet meetings, at conferences of the government party, at sessions of special parliamentary committees and in discussions between ministers and their departmental heads, and that, given this system of legislation, an independent country party had either to bargain behind the scenes or to move amendments to bills during their consideration in committee. Where concessions were made privately, the Country Party would have difficulty in claiming authorship for policies, and in parliamentary proceedings an unsympathetic government could always limit the debate by invoking the 'guillotine', by forcing a measure through under threat of dissolution or by obtaining the occasional support of the Opposition. In a coalition, however, the Country Party ministers would have a much wider opportunity to influence the drafting of legislation and the administration of existing statutes. As a technique for realizing demands, therefore, the coalition strategy was highly valued. The conditional-support strategy would have had more relevance twenty or thirty years earlier, but the rise of the Labor Party had forced the loosely organized non-Labor parties to bring their factions under control and to tighten the rules of parliamentary procedure; in particular, it had become much less common for legislation to be substantially altered on the floor of the House.

However, the adoption of the coalition strategy involved both an alliance with the National Party and a declaration of war on the Labor Party; in other words an admission that the Country Party no longer aspired to the status of a third unit in the Australian party system. In 1919 and 1920, when the country party movement made its first solid impact on the established political order, there had been a possibility that Australia might find itself with a system of three parties and that its parliamentary and constitutional conventions would have to be modified accordingly. The National Party assumed responsibility for bringing the new party to terms and persuading it to conform to traditional values, at least to the extent of working with the National Party so that, for all significant govern-

mental, parliamentary and electoral purposes, they constituted a single unit, the conservative party in a two-party system. In this sense, the decision of the country parties to accept coalitions with the Nationalists was also a decision to conform, but it took several years for this to be fully understood.

While the rank and file members of the Country Party organizations were reasonably ready to accept the idea of a coalition, they were much less ready to endorse electoral pacts with the Nationalists and thereby to acknowledge, in effect, that their movement had reached its electoral limits. Besides, the measures taken to safeguard the Country Party's status and autonomy in the federal arrangement were not always acceptable in State politics. In Western Australia, the parliamentary Country Party was unable to assert its rights in the Mitchell Ministry, and in Victoria the V.F.U. refused to acquiesce in a coalition if this meant an electoral pact as well. In New South Wales, by contrast, the Progressives were still trying to produce results with the conditional-support strategy, much to the chagrin of their leader, Michael Bruxner. 'We do not embarrass the [Fuller] Government half as much as they embarrass us', he said on one occasion.[1] Finally, although the Federal Country Party was able to claim great influence on the policies of the Bruce-Page Ministry, especially as regards tax concessions, financial aid for rural development, the protection of some primary industries, and the extension of telephone services, it was not able to make the spectacular stands about tariff issues and compulsory produce pools which some of its supporters had been led to expect, and the latter began to call for a return to the old style of conditional support.

In the years 1923 to 1925, for all these reasons, the value and the political relevance of the coalition strategy were argued out at length within the country party movement. For the first time, debates about doctrine and the function of the party became informed and relatively sophisticated. Three things were to happen: the existing political situation was critically reassessed from the country parties' point of view; in the light of the new assessment, doctrines and strategies were reformulated; and finally, with increasing confidence, the coalition strategy was put into full application by the federal and several State parties. The advocates of the old conditional-support strategy also sharpened their ideas and, in Victoria, prepared themselves for a trial of strength. These were years of constructive and creative thinking for the movement—but they were also years of uncertainty: would coalitions lead to the absorption of the country parties, would electoral pacts limit their ability to grow? Fears of frustration, of loss of identity, of declining influence, and of betrayal were once more abroad in the country parties. Another round of crises was about to begin

[1] *Progressive Party Central Council Minutes*, vol. 2, 29 Apr. 1924.

Victoria: John Allan and the Radical Conscience

Once the wheat pool crisis of 1921 had passed, the Victorian Country Party settled down under John Allan's leadership to provide uncritical and largely unproductive backing for H. S. W. Lawson's National Party government. Not that Allan lacked ambition, but until the Bruce-Page agreement had provided a solid precedent he would not have dared propose a coalition with the State Nationalists. His position was greatly strengthened, however, by the decision of the V.F.U. Conference of March 1923 to endorse the federal coalition; in this case, the Union's dominant centre group, which had sided with the radicals during the 1921 crisis, chose to support the conservatives. Led by men such as Edwin Reseigh and A. L. N. Walter, this centre group was more concerned with the economic rather than the political value of the V.F.U. and the Country Party, and questions of strategy were for them secondary to questions of effectiveness. They had supported the radicals over the wheat pool affair not because they believed in the conditional-support strategy but because they favoured the compulsory marketing system, and in 1923 they endorsed the federal coalition because they thought it might produce good results. While they appreciated the fact that it might lessen the party's independence, they were willing to give the arrangement a trial.

John Allan began his bargaining later in the year. On 30 August the Country Party combined with some discontented Nationalists to attack the Lawson Ministry, which, with the support of the Labor Party, survived a vital division by 36 votes to 19.[2] To avoid further trouble Lawson then offered the Country Party four places in a reconstructed cabinet, but a meeting of the V.F.U. Central Council on 4 September stood out for six places and the parliamentary party (on 5 September) declared for five. Allan and Lawson discussed the matter and finally agreed that the cabinet should consist of seven Nationalists and five Country Party representatives and that the parliamentary parties should continue to meet separately. The new ministry, which took office on 7 September, included Allan (Commissioner of Crown Lands and Survey, Minister of Immigration), F. E. Old (Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Railways), G. L. Goudie, M.L.C. (Commissioner of Public Works, Minister of Mines), and W. P. Crockett, M.L.C., and M. E. Wettenhall (Ministers without portfolio) as its Country Party component. Although Allan took precedence after Lawson in the cabinet, Sir William McPherson, a Nationalist, was given the Treasury portfolio. Allan chose the Country Party ministers himself, their portfolios being allocated definitely at the first cabinet meeting.[3]

[2] *V.P.D.*, vol. 164, 30 Aug. 1923, pp. 845-68. See also *Argus*, 31 Aug., 5 Sept. 1923.

[3] *Farmers' Advocate*, 14 Sept. 1923; 21 Mar. 1924. See also *Argus*, 6, 7 Sept. 1923.

The radicals immediately moved in to the attack. 'The separate entity of our party has been tossed to the winds', declared Albert Dunstan to the Assembly on the 11th, 'We have reverted to the two-party system as far as this House is concerned.'[4] He and his supporters not only criticized the coalition on principle but made the far more damaging charge, at least in the eyes of the V.F.U.'s centre group, that Allan had not shown good faith in his dealing with the Union; he had contravened a resolution of the 1919 V.F.U. conference specifying that if the Country Party joined a coalition it should obtain a majority of the cabinet posts and had consulted neither the parliamentary party nor a special committee of the V.F.U. Central Council before making the final agreement with Lawson. Allan replied that the Country Party would have a better chance of influencing policy and preventing a loss of country seats in the next electoral redistribution now that it had joined a coalition, and that in any case the near collapse of the previous ministry had obliged the Country Party to agree to a coalition in the interests of stable government. In the *Farmers' Advocate*, J. J. Hall drove home the radicals' case by pointing out that governmental stability could have been provided by a reconstructed National Party ministry and that the Country Party could have obtained its policy objectives by bargaining from the ministerial corner as in the past.[5]

For some time there was a likelihood that the V.F.U. Central Council would oppose Allan, but its moderate members chose to combine with conservatives to sanction the coalition. Although admitting that the party had ignored the 1919 resolution, it claimed at its meeting of 13 November to be satisfied that:

> the identity of the Party will be preserved by the provision of an equality of power in Cabinet mutually agreed upon by the Leaders of the two wings of the Composite Ministry, and an arrangement come to between the Country Party Ministers and their Party as a whole, which ensures that the partnership may be continued only so long as it has the sanction of a majority of the Party.

By ten votes to three, the Council then resolved to recommend that the Country Party's members 'accept the position by according to the Party their support until such time as the Annual Conference has had an opportunity of fully discussing and ordering upon the situation'.[6]

Now the coalition had won qualified approval. However, the great question was whether the V.F.U. would also lend its backing to the electoral alliance which the National Party was almost certain to require. Unfortunately for Allan, the issue was raised in difficult circumstances, and as early as January 1924. In that month a Labor candidate won the Nationalist seat of Dalhousie in a by-election, a result

[4] *V.P.D.*, vol. 164, 11 Sept. 1923, p. 914.

[5] See *Farmers' Advocate*, 14 Sept. 1923.

[6] *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 3, 13 Nov. 1923, p. 8.

which the National Party claimed could have been prevented had the V.F.U. not insisted on putting forward its own nominee. 'The coalition is a partnership', said Lawson during the campaign. 'There must be arrangements in the House, and in the constituencies as well.'[7] Afterwards he obliged the Country Party's cabinet members to agree that unless they could persuade the impending V.F.U. conference to approve 'co-operation in regard to the support of Ministerial candidates,' they should withdraw from the ministry.[8]

When the V.F.U. Central Council met in February it showed no sympathy for Allan's predicament, and framed a motion for submission to the annual conference which was in effect a challenge to Lawson. The motion objected to the method by which the coalition had been arranged and declared 'that fuller consideration should have been given towards preserving the distinct identity of the party'. It then laid down the conditions under which the coalition government should be supported in future: the party, by a majority vote, could withdraw from any arrangement; the party's right to contest all seats at elections was to be retained; the practice of each party's meeting separately was to be continued; and prior to the dissolution of Parliament, the current 'arrangement' was to be reviewed at a joint meeting of the parliamentary party and the Central Council. The resolution also recommended that the parliamentary party, by a majority vote:

> be empowered, if necessity arises to enter into such working agreement with another political party as will best carry into effect the political platform and policy of the Victorian Farmers' Union, subject to the endorsement of the central council.

and that 'any arrangement entered into by a majority of the party and endorsed by central council, shall be binding upon all members of the party'.[9]

This resolution formed the main topic for debate at the V.F.U.'s ninth annual conference, held at Bendigo early in March.[10] While the radicals maintained that it should be made even stronger and should declare against coalitions unequivocally, the conservatives (urged on by Allan and Page) argued that it should admit the necessity for electoral pacts; unconvinced, the solid mass of centre delegates insisted that the compromise inherent in the Central Council's policy be respected. At first the men of the centre voted with the conservatives against a proposal to have the provision for future coalitions deleted; later they sided with the radicals in rejecting a conservative motion which would have removed the censure on the

[7] *Argus*, 24 Jan. 1924.

[8] Ibid., 20 Mar. 1924. See also ibid., 15, 17 Jan., 14 Mar. 1924.

[9] *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 3, 6 Feb. 1924, p. 12; *Argus*, 8 Feb. 1924.

[10] *Farmers' Advocate*, 21 Mar. 1924.

parliamentary party for having sanctioned the coalition and the proposed electoral alliance. Allan, Page and Thomas Paterson maintained that the leader's prerogatives should not be restricted to the extent envisaged in the resolution and that coalitions provided country parties with the best means of influencing policy and promoting stable government. Dunstan argued for the radicals that the state coalition had been formed without sufficient safeguards to preserve the Country Party's independence, that coalitions led to electoral alliances, and that the V.F.U. should have final control, through its Central Council, over the parliamentary party. Percy Stewart, still reluctant to break with Page, advocated the need for compromise in the interests of unity, even if this meant permitting the state coalition to continue. After overnight discussions, the Central Council amended the motion to provide for the support of the state coalition for the life of the current parliament only; however, the provision empowering the parliamentary Country Party to arrange future coalitions was retained, with the added condition that when such action was considered by the Central Council its parliamentary members would be ineligible to vote. On the insistence of Dr Page, a new clause was added excluding the Federal Country Party from the operation of these 'political safeguards'.[11] The amended resolution was finally adopted by the conference.

On the basic question, that of the electoral alliance, the conference had held to the Central Council line, and Lawson had no hesitation in terminating the coalition agreement. He resigned his commission and, on 19 March, formed another, purely Nationalist cabinet. Before long, however, John Allan and his colleagues began exploring the prospects for another coalition under a Premier other than Lawson.[12] To make this possible, Lawson had to resign as Premier and as leader of the National Party, his place being taken by Sir Alexander Peacock, who formed his ministry on 28 April. Lawson was then nominated for the Speakership, which had just become vacant, but when the election for this office took place on 30 April, a combination of the Labor Party and some Country Party members voted to appoint John Bowser, the Country Party representative for Benalla.[13] No longer even a cabinet member, Lawson was obliged to rejoin the ranks of the National Party

Negotiations for a coalition under Peacock had barely begun when, on 20 May, the Country Party joined with the Labor Party to defeat the motion (by 31 votes to 26) for the second reading of an Electoral Districts Bill which would have increased by four the number of Melbourne electorates.[14] Peacock told the Governor that the

[11] *Countryman* (Melb.), 10 Oct. 1924.

[12] *Argus*, 27 Mar. 1924.

[13] *V.P.D.*, vol. 166, 30 Apr. 1924, p. 3373.

[14] Ibid., 20 May 1924, p. 3690

Assembly was unworkable and obtained a dissolution.[15] The election campaign which then followed was mild and disorganized, quite unlike the pitched battle fought before the 1921 election; the Nationalists did not attack the Country Party for having voted with Labor, and the Country Party candidates were in their turn guarded and moderate. The poll, held on 26 June, resulted in the return of 27 Laborites, 13 Country Party representatives, 5 Liberals (sitting members who had opposed the government over the Electoral Districts Bill) and 20 Nationalists and pro-government Independents. By increasing its following from 21 to 27 members, the Labor Party had become the largest single group in the Assembly, and the V.F.U.'s radicals began to insist that the Country Party should vote the Peacock Ministry out of office and support a Labor administration in its stead.

The position of the radicals in the Victorian party had been greatly strengthened when, in May, Bruce and Page had brought out their proposal for an electoral alliance between the Federal National and Country Parties. This move had not only outraged many of the V.F.U.'s moderate members but had induced Percy Stewart to break with Page and campaign against the pact, which was referred to special meetings of the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation and the National Federation. Consequently, John Allan found the greatest difficulty in gaining support for his efforts to reach an understanding with Peacock. On 3 July the parliamentary party authorized negotiations for another coalition, but only on condition that the Country Party obtained six of the twelve cabinet places, including the premiership, terms which were approved by the Central Council on the 7th.[16] As the radical and moderate leaders must have anticipated, Peacock refused to surrender the premiership and made the Country Party a final offer of six cabinet posts without the premiership.[17] Already the Country Party was exploring the alternative; at its meeting of 8 July, the Central Council had resolved that:

> in the event of the State Country Party Members not reaching finality in connection with the formation of a Government on the Liberal side of the House, the Managers be asked to interview the Labor Party and ascertain the best conditions which that Party is prepared to give.[18]

Labor responded immediately by offering for the Country Party's support concessions which included a reduction of rail freights and fares, a compulsory wheat pool and a butter stabilization scheme.[19]

These proposals were considered on 9 July by a meeting of the

[15] *Argus*, 23 May 1924

[16] *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 3, 7 July 1924, p. 30.

[17] *V.P.D.*, vol. 167, 16 July 1924, p. 46.

[18] *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 3, 8 July 1924, p. 29.

[19] *Countryman* (Melb.), 11 July 1924.

Country Party, which decided to co-operate with Labor in voting the Peacock Ministry out of office. It is difficult to reconstruct what happened at this meeting but press reports suggest that Dunstan and Carlisle, in pressing the radicals' argument for supporting Labor, had the backing of moderate men such as Alfred Downward and A. L. N. Walter, and that Allan and the conservatives found themselves unable to fight back effectively. They probably appreciated that the radicals were in a strong position, and that the refusal of the previous offer to the Nationalists left them without an alternative policy. Nevertheless, there was still a possibility that the threat of a Labor government would persuade the Nationalists to swallow their pride and accept Allan as Premier.[20] However, on the 16th, the Labor and Country Party members joined to carry a censure motion against the government by 43 votes to 16,[21] whereupon Peacock resigned and Michael Prendergast was commissioned to form Victoria's second Labor Ministry.

Supported by the Country Party during its four months in office, the new ministry made every effort to cater for rural interests. It reduced rail freights and fares, increased the funds available for the construction of country roads, began an enquiry into the soldier settlement programme and attempted to establish a compulsory marketing pool for the wheat industry.[22] Small wheat farmers welcomed the latter move, for the voluntary wheat pool formed in 1921 had been unable to compete effectively with the private grain traders, and had handled only 42 per cent of the 1923-4 harvest.[23] Labor's bill to institute a compulsory pool actually passed the Legislative Assembly, but was defeated in the Legislative Council by 17 votes to 13.[24] As a substitute, the voluntary pool was continued for another year. The V.F.U.'s radicals were delighted to find that the conditional-support strategy, judged in terms of these results, had regained favour, and the Central Council, despite pressure, refused to vary its previous offer to the Nationalists. John Allan, growing impatient, told a Central Council meeting on 26 September:

> I am not a socialist, not by any means, but I am told we are neither anti-Labor nor anti-Nationalist, and that we should sit in the corner and try and screw what we can out of someone else. Is that right? . . . If I sit on the rail much longer—and I can tell you it is getting pretty hard—I am wondering which side I will tumble off.[25]

In November, the National Party's fear that the Labor government might survive the session and introduce higher rates of taxation

[20] See *Argus*, 11, 17, 18 July 1924; *V.P.D.*, vol. 167, 16 July 1924, p. 42.

[21] Ibid., p. 56.

[22] See the government's policy statement, ibid., 26 Aug. 1924, pp. 99-101.

[23] Ibid., vol. 169, 30 Sept. 1925, p. 1374.

[24] Ibid., vol. 167, 21 Oct. 1924, p. 993.

[25] *Countryman* (Melb.), 3 Oct. 1924.

induced it to meet the terms first offered in July, six cabinet posts and the Premiership for the Country Party. Allan was delighted and moved a no-confidence motion in the government, having previously consulted the parliamentary party and the V.F.U. Central Council. The motion was carried on 12 November by 34 votes to 28.[26] Prendergast asked the Governor for a dissolution but, meeting with refusal, he resigned his commission. Allan was then asked to form a ministry, and his coalition government was sworn in on the 18th. The Country Party ministers were: Allan (Premier, Minister of Water Supply, Minister of Railways), Alfred Downward (President of the Board of Land and Works, Commissioner of Crown Lands and Survey, and Minister of Immigration), G. L. Goudie, M.L.C. (Commissioner of Public Works, Minister of Mines), M. W. J. Bourchier (Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Markets), W. P. Crockett, M.L.C., and E. J. Mackrell (both Honorary Ministers). Sir Alexander Peacock, the National Party leader, was both Treasurer and Deputy Premier. Whereas in September 1923 Allan had chosen the Country Party ministers for the first coalition, on this occasion they were selected by exhaustive ballot at a meeting of the parliamentary party.[27]

The transfer of power would not have proceeded so smoothly had Dunstan not been ill at the time[28] and had the *Farmers' Advocate*, now renamed the *Countryman*, not taken up a pro-Allan editorial line. The change in line coincided with the invitation to H. V. Mackay, a wealthy manufacturer of agricultural machinery, to join the Board of Directors managing Victorian Newspapers Ltd, which published the *Countryman*.[29] T. Tunnecliffe (A.L.P.—Collingwood) claimed that Mackay's donation of £50,000 to the company had enabled him virtually to control its policy.[30] In any case, the old firm was back in power. 'It was a mystery', said John Allan, 'how Labor ever got into office.'[31]

The radicals now hoped that their moderate colleagues had been sufficiently impressed by the record of the Prendergast government to reconsider that attitude towards the coalition strategy. No longer were there technical points which could be used to frustrate Allan, because the Country Party leader had made a virtue of not taking any step which would contravene either the resolution of the March conference at Bendigo or the terms laid down by the Central Council in July. At every step, in fact, Allan had been careful to keep both

[26] *Argus*, 6, 7 Nov. 1924; *V.P.D.*, vol. 168, 12 Nov. 1924, p. 1410.

[27] *Argus*, 15, 18 Nov. 1924.

[28] *V.P.D.*, vol. 168, 5 Nov. 1924, p. 1259.

[29] *Countryman* (Melb.), 17 Oct. 1924. For pro-coalition editorials, see ibid., 7, 14 Nov. 1924.

[30] *V.P.D.*, vol. 168, 12 Nov. 1924, pp. 1403-4.

[31] *Countryman* (Melb.), 7 Nov. 1924.

the parliamentary party and the Central Council fully informed of what he was doing. The radicals' position had never been strong, except during the 1921 wheat pool crisis. They had wrecked the Lawson-Allan coalition only by working on the centre group's objections to an electoral alliance and at no stage had they been able to persuade the Central Council to refuse to sanction any further coalition agreements. In July, with the tide running in their favour, they had been able to insist only on seemingly impossible terms for the proposed Peacock-Allan coalition, and now Honest John Allan was Premier in Victoria.

New South Wales: The Tribulations of Conditional Support

In New South Wales the Progressive Party had no radical wing, no desire to work with the Labor Party, and it possessed a conservative and able leadership: in short, here was a party for which the coalition strategy was made to measure, but for the fact that it had broken with its former leader, Walter Wearne, for having joined a coalition ministry in December 1921. The True Blues were uncomfortably aware, when they endorsed the Bruce-Page agreement of February 1923, that they were denying their principles of the year before. Their spokesmen claimed that coalitions were suited only to federal politics, or that Wearne had made a bad bargain and Page a good one, or that had the party held together until after the 1922 State election 'no doubt the same arrangement as that agreed to in the Federal sphere would have had favourable consideration'.[32] As it was, Michael Bruxner had to lead a party committed to providing conditional support to Sir George Fuller's National government, a singularly unrewarding experience.

The election of 25 March 1922 had left the position in the Assembly as follows: National Party 41, Labor Party 36, Progressive Party 9, 2 Independents, 1 Independent Coalitionist, and one member of the Democratic (Catholic) Party. Having lost its majority, the Labor government resigned and Fuller formed his minority cabinet, which included Wearne, Ley and Bavin of those Progressives who had supported the coalition proposal before the election. From the beginning of the parliament, the True Blue Progressives supported the government and showed little inclination to work with the Labor Party, especially after J. T. Lang became its leader on 30 September 1923. During the life of this Assembly, the Progressives voted with the government against Labor in 706 of the 787 divisions, split in 47 cases, and voted against the government (though not always with Labor) on only 34 occasions. Fuller and his ministers, however, did not go out of their way to help the Progressives; indeed, according to Bruxner, they 'tried to ignore us on the cross benches and simply bring down legislation without previous consultation with us', though

[32] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1923, pp. 30-1.

subsequently they did agree to co-operate.[33] Bruxner's men raised an outcry about the Sydney Harbour Bridge Bill, which came up in the 1922 session, but such opportunities for impressing the outback did not occur very often. As the time drew near for the 1923 session, Bruxner spoke his mind at a meeting of the Progressive Party Central Council, emphasizing the difficulty of opposing the National Party government without being able to defeat it. 'We have to do something or get out', he said.[34]

Bruxner, known affectionately as 'the Colonel', was very much a product of the New England *élite*. He was born on 25 March 1882 on his father's property near Tabulam, on the upper reaches of the Clarence River, and was educated at The Armidale School. He went on to study law at the University of Sydney but gave up his course after two years and returned home. Attracted by the stock and station business, he established a Tenterfield agency in partnership with a friend and made widespread contacts throughout northern New South Wales. A good horseman, he served during World War I as a member of the Sixth Light Horse Regiment which played a distinguished part in Allenby's Middle Eastern campaigns. He returned to Australia a Lieutenant-Colonel with the D.S.O. and the Croix de Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, and purchased a grazing property of 7,000 acres west of Tenterfield. At this stage, with many other returned soldiers, he was attracted by the crusading aspect of the New States and Progressive movements, and was elected for Northern Tableland in the 1920 State election. In many ways, Bruxner was a sounder leader than Page; he was less erratic, less given to intrigue, and more concerned about holding his party together as an effective fighting force. He came to grips with the intricacies of parliamentary life in a remarkably short space of time, and showed great coolness and nerve during the crisis which led to the secession of the True Blues from the Wearne group in December 1921.[35]

He saw the party as a new force in politics, fighting for the rural electorate and balanced development. When he recalls the twenties, Bruxner remembers first the camaraderie and the loyalty of the True Blues. Theirs was a fellow-feeling which reflected both their political insecurity and their sense of being emissaries from a remote and neglected part of Australia. He spoke of 'us bushrangers' making an assault on both the National and Labor Parties during the debates on the Sydney Bridge Bill in 1922, and conveyed the impression that

[33] Letters from Colonel M. F. Bruxner to the writer, 24 Sept. 1956 and 31 May 1965.

[34] *Progressive Party Central Council Minutes*, vol. 1, 28 June 1923, p. 154.

[35] Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, pp. 68-71; D. A. Aitkin, 'Some Problems of the Political Biographer in Australia', Seminar Paper, Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University, 17 July 1964. Dr Aitkin is writing a biography of Colonel Bruxner.

he saw the early Country Party as a guerrilla force or a light raiding party, harrying the enemy whenever the opportunity offered.[36] Bruxner was not only a forceful man, he was also something of a political puritan, and saw clashes of principle where other men might see only a difference of opinion. At the time of the crisis of December 1921, he had taken the line that a preference for coalitions indicated weakness and had used the words 'separate identity' with a preacher's force. He was undoubtedly the rallying point for the True Blues on this occasion, and, having made his stand, he did his best to make the Fuller Ministry more responsive to the demands of his party.

The difficulties he faced in extracting concessions from an unsympathetic administration were brought out strikingly in August 1923, when the government refused to pay compensation to farmers for losses incurred in the operations of the wartime wheat pool. A Royal Commission appointed to investigate the affairs of the State Wheat Office, the agency in charge of the pool, reported in 1919 that losses had been incurred in the handling and sale of the 1916-17 crop. A further inquiry was conducted by a Wheat Pool Compensation Board, which, in January 1921, found that losses had occurred to the extent of £549,000, but that this amount had been more than balanced by an overpayment to growers of £856,000 in the same season. On these grounds F. A. Chaffey, Fuller's Minister for Agriculture, announced in 1922 that the compensation would be paid not to the growers, but to the Australian Wheat Board.[37]

This was an issue which Bruxner could not ignore. He obtained an assurance from Fuller that the wheat farmers would receive individual compensation only to find, however, that the government went ahead and paid the disputed sum into the Wheat Board's accounts. Having committed himself to a stand on principle, he declared that his party would not be afraid to precipitate a dissolution over the matter,[38] but he was placed at a disadvantage when the Labor Party also included a protest at the government's action in a censure motion tabled on 8 August.[39] Unwilling to join the Labor members in such a drastic step, on the following day Bruxner stated that unless the government could show adequate reasons why compensation could not be paid to the growers, he would have one of the Progressive members move an amendment to test the feeling of the House.[40] Shortly afterwards, the F.S.A.'s annual conference also called for the payment of

[36] Interview with Colonel Bruxner, Sydney, 28 June 1956.

[37] 'Reports of Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Administration of the State Wheat Office', *N.S.W. P.P.*, 1920, vol. 1, pp. 219-50; N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Reports*, 1920, pp. 19-20; 1922, p. 7; 1923, p. 35; *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 91, 8 Aug. 1923, pp. 98-100. See also Ellis, op. cit., pp. 74-6.

[38] *S.M.H.*, 7 Aug. 1923.

[39] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 91, 8 Aug. 1923, p. 93.

[40] Ibid., 9 Aug. 1923, p. 131.

individual compensation but by now it was considered that a compromise settlement would be the outcome. On 30 August the government announced that the Auditor-General would look into the matters in dispute and on the same day the Progressives voted with the government to defeat Lang's censure motion.[41] No other course was open to Bruxner; he would have been ill-advised to force an election on an issue which concerned only the wheatgrowers and which would have lost his party votes in grazing and dairying areas. Indeed the Graziers' Association, still the Progressive Party's main financial support, would almost certainly have opposed an attempt to defeat the government at this point. Bruxner put his case to the F.S.A. conference in 1924:

> If as a third party you have the balance of power, by the assistance of the other party in the House, you could turn the Government out. But supposing we took up some question which, say, was of great interest to the wheat grower, or of some particular interest to the dairy farmer, or something like that, and went to the Government and said if you do not give us one of these things we will put you out, and supposing they did not give them, what would be the result? It would mean taking your men to the country on a grievance that would simply affect the wheat farmer, which would be a very fine electioneering cry for him, but a poor one for the dairyfarmer. . . . you are not going to use that political power which you possess for some sectional interest; otherwise you might achieve something just for the time being that would ultimately lead you no distance along the road to success so far as your organisation was concerned.[42]

The wheat compensation affair had at least cleared the way for subsequent understandings, and in October 1923 the Progressives reached an agreement with the government over the programme for the remainder of the session. An anonymous Progressive member even told a reporter that, should his party again hold the balance of power in the next parliament, 'it was more than probable that negotiations would take place for the formation of a Composite Ministry'.[43]

In 1924 a revival of interest in the question of new states helped to restore the fortunes of the Progressive Party. During the 1922 session of the Assembly, Bruxner had moved that the government take steps to form a new state in northern New South Wales, but at the instance of the Nationalists this proposal had been amended to affirm the desirability of its being considered by a federal constitutional convention.[44] When the matter was referred to the Prime Minister in

[41] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1923, p. 58; *S.M.H.*, 30 Aug. 1923; *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 91, 30 Aug. 1923, p. 579.

[42] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1924, pp. 32-3.

[43] *S.M.H.*, 19 Oct. 1923.

[44] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 88, 22 Aug. 1922, p. 1194; 19 Sept. 1922, pp. 1942-72; vol. 89, p. 1973

1923, he suggested that the State Parliament should decide on the terms of partition, especially with regard to boundaries and the division of debts and resources, before submitting the matter to the Commonwealth government.[45] A convention of the Northern New State League held at Armidale in June 1923 proposed that the State government appoint a Royal Commission to go into the matter[46] and, after further representations, one was appointed in March 1924. With Judge Cohen as its chairman and Colin Sinclair and J. A. Lorimer as representatives of the Northern and Riverina Leagues respectively, it was to consider the practicability of forming a new state in New South Wales. The Commission conducted extensive inquiries in a number of country centres, and heard lengthy submissions from V. C. Thompson, secretary of the Northern League, and from Page.[47] In May 1925, however, it reported that the Northern League's proposal for a new state, even in an amended form, was 'neither practicable nor desirable',[48] and there the matter rested for a few years. From the point of view of the Progressive and Federal Country Parties, however, the agitation associated with the Commission's hearings had revived something of the separatist enthusiasm which had characterized the 1920-1 movement, and to the extent that the Commission's adverse report could be described as another example of city interests foiling the new state crusade, it was a blessing in disguise.

Anti-urban revivalism was one thing, parliamentary strategy another. As the 1924 session of the Assembly approached, Bruxner came under increasing pressure, both from Nationalists and from people in his own party, to agree to a coalition with the National Party. Two things stood in the way, one was a clause in the Progressive Party constitution prohibiting the Central Council from allying 'with any other political body' (a provision adopted in 1922)[49] and the other was Bruxner's sense of propriety. He told the Central Council on 29 April 1924 that the parliamentary party 'had unanimously decided that they would enter into no coalition or form any composite ministry with the present Government at the present time'. If the Progressive Party were to join a coalition, he claimed, many small farmers would transfer their allegiance to the Labor Party. 'The Graziers' vote was numerically small, but the vote of the small farmer was a big one. Lose that and a Labour Government was assured. To form a composite ministry with Sir George Fuller and go to the country would put Labour in.' He concluded his address by stating that if any member

[45] Ellis, *History of the Australian Country Party*, p. 109.

[46] Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, pp. 89-90; R. S. Parker, 'Why New States?', in *New States for Australia*, p. 4.

[47] *New States Royal Commission, 1924, Evidence*, vol. 3, pp. 2054-98; vol. 4, pp. 2524-38 (Thompson); ibid., vol. 1, pp. 7-28; vol. 4, pp. 2173-219 (Page).

[48] Parker, op. cit., p. 4.

[49] *N.S.W. Graziers' Annual, 1922-23*, p. 29.

of the Council was strongly of the opinion that he and some of his colleagues should join a coalition 'he would ask to be relieved of the Leadership of the Party in the House'.[50] In August, after the federal election pact had been arranged, Bruxner revealed another level of his thinking on the subject. By now he had told the party that he wished to resign as leader.

> He wished the Executive to know quite clearly that in his opinion his position had become quite untenable. His line of action had been more or less set aside by Dr. Page. You could not play fast and loose with the public. He would like to know definitely from the Council whether as a matter of expediency they are going to adopt one course in one sphere, and another in another. He had promised his colleagues that he would take no drastic action, but for the good of the movement itself you could not have one leader doing one thing and meeting with concurrence, and another leader meeting with concurrence in doing something else.

Bruxner disliked the fact that he was being pressed to deny the very principle for which he had stood when he opposed Wearne in 1921.

> We told one set of people that we would not enter into the ministry, that we are a separate entity, and would sit on the cross benches until we got strong enough to lead. On the other hand we say we are prepared to take a half share in a ministry with nine or ten members.[51]

Meanwhile, the conditional-support strategy was being pursued cautiously. On 28 May 1924 Fuller announced that the leaders of the Progressive and National Parties had discussed the business for the last session of Parliament and that 'an agreement was reached as to the programme to be submitted',[52] 'an agreement between two gentlemen', said Bruxner.[53] As a result, the 1924 session passed without any serious incident affecting the relationship of the two parties, apart from a brief period of tension created by the government's refusal to endorse a Progressive nominee in a Senate by-election.[54] Bruxner took pains, nevertheless, to make sure that his party got the credit for certain legislation, such as the Main Roads Bill. During the drafting stage, this measure had been shaped to meet the Progressives' demand that the expenditure of the Main Roads Fund be divided into two accounts, one for country roads and the other for Sydney roads (which the Minister supported),[55] but when it came before the Assembly,

[50] *Progressive Party Central Council Minutes*, vol. 2, 29 Apr. 1924, p. 64.

[51] Ibid., 19 Aug. 1924, p. 98.

[52] *S.M.H.*, 29 May 1924. See also a statement by T. R. Bavin, ibid., 20 July 1926.

[53] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 95, 3 July 1924, p. 100.

[54] *S.M.H.*, 24 Nov. 1924.

[55] Interview with Colonel Bruxner, Sydney, 28 June 1956.

Bruxner had the bill amended to provide for the inclusion of the Blue Mountains Shire in the metropolitan area (that is the County of Cumberland) for the purpose of the Act, thus ensuring that the maintenance of roads in this shire would be met by the metropolitan rather than the country fund.[56] The Progressives had argued that the Shire was 'the playground of the city', quietly ignoring the fact that it included fifty miles of the Great Western Highway, the main route to the districts of the Central West and West. In any case, this gain was cited during the 1925 election campaign as further proof of the party's concern for developing country roads.[57]

For all its hostility to Sydney, the Progressive Party had to live with the fact that many of its leaders had made their homes in the capital and were accustomed to playing their part in its business world. This aspect of its affairs was given publicity when in September 1924 J. T. Lang told the Assembly about a furore over a cement contract in which several Progressive members were implicated. According to Lang, a public accountant had, at the end of 1923, obtained on behalf of Cement Products Limited a government contract to supply 50,000 tons of cement per annum for three years at £2.17s.6d. per ton. Later this agreement had been criticized by the Board of Advice and Reference, a standing committee of public servants and government engineers, on the grounds that no provision had been made to ensure that the company manufactured the cement itself, that the contract had not been put up for public competition, and that it was not desirable to give the contract to a company whose capital was only £40,000 when a plant designed to meet the requirements of the agreement would cost about £288,000. Despite the Board's advice the cabinet had decided to have the contract ratified by an Act of Parliament. Lang further alleged that the directors of Cement Products Limited were prepared to sell their contract for £80,000 to the Standard Portland Cement Company, floated only in 1924, which was already advertising the transfer in its prospectus. Later Lang pointed out that the shareholders and directors of both companies included such well-known Progressive figures as A. K. Trethowan, W. W. Killen and E. J. Gorman, as well as W. A. Holman, the former Premier and now a member of the National Association Council.[58] However, Fuller and R. T. Ball, the Minister of Public Works, claimed that there was no dishonesty, that the new company would reduce the price of cement by introducing healthy competition into the market, and that the Storey Labor government (1920-1) had also offered cement contracts without the sanction of Parliament; and

[56] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 96, 28 Aug. 1924, p. 1613; 3 Sept. 1924, p. 1723.

[57] 'The Progressive Party of N.S.W., Policy Speech. Delivered by Lieut-Colonel M. F. Bruxner, M.L.A., Goulburn, 28th April, 1925', Sydney, 1925, p. 11

[58] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 97, 23 Sept. 1924, pp. 2118-38; 24 Sept. 1924, pp. 2216-20.

Bruxner said it was absurd to suggest 'that the whole of the members of this syndicate are rogues, thieves, and vagabonds'.[59] Subsequently the cement contract was ratified by an Act of Parliament.

In the election campaign of 1925, Bruxner attempted to lock this skeleton firmly in the cupboard, and concentrated on telling country people that the Progressive Party was the only one which could further their interests, given the fact that the National Party represented 'organised commercialism' and the Labor Party 'organised industrialism'.[60] However, the poll held on 30 May 1925 produced a Labor victory; the composition of the new Assembly was: Labor Party 46, National Party 32, Progressives 9, Protestant Labor 1, and Independents 2. Once the result became clear, Fuller resigned his commission, J. T. Lang formed a Labor ministry, and the Progressives found themselves sharing the Opposition benches with the Nationalists once more. Would Bruxner have sanctioned a coalition had Labor not won this election? He had said during the campaign that he would not join a Nationalist cabinet[61] but his dissatisfaction with the conditional-support strategy would probably have made him change his mind, especially in view of the fact that the federal and Victorian coalitions were working successfully at the time.

Western Australia: The Country Party and the Fall of the Mitchell Government

In Western Australia, where the Country Party had been represented on a coalition government since June 1917, the leadership's main problem by 1922 was to reassert the party's rights and privileges within the non-Labor alliance. After James Mitchell had become Premier in May 1919, the Country Party's position had grown more and more confused, until the parliamentary group represented nothing more than a large faction in a general ministerial party and ceased to answer to its supporting organization, the Primary Producers' Association (P.P.A.). This had been very clear after the State election of 12 March 1921, at which 17 Labor, 16 Country Party, 10 Liberal and 5 National Labor members were returned, along with one Independent and one Independent Country Party member. As the largest unit on the non-Labor side, the Country Party might have been expected to play a leading role in the subsequent cabinet reconstruction, but the Premier chose his ministers and allocated portfolios without reference to it.[62] His cabinet of six members contained three Country Party members in John Scaddan (Mines and Railways), F. T.

[59] Ibid., p. 2259. For the statements by Fuller and Ball, see ibid., 23 Sept. 1924, pp. 2138-49 and 2155-63.

[60] 'The Progressive Party of N.S.W., Policy Speech', p. 3.

[61] *S.M.H.*, 13 Apr. 1925.

[62] *W.A. P.D.*, vol. 64, 10 Aug. 1921, p. 158; P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1924, p. 41.

Broun (Colonial Secretary and Minister of Public Health) and H. K. Maley (Agriculture), but the important portfolios of the Treasury, Lands, Education, and Public Works were held by Liberals, and Sir Hal Colebatch, not a Country Party man, took precedence in the cabinet after Mitchell. Besides, the party's leader, T. H. Harrison, remained a private member.

As a ministerial faction, however, the Country Party had proved adept at gaining concessions for rural interests,[63] a fact which explains to some extent why it recruited so many new members during this period. Five ex-Liberals joined the party in the months immediately preceding the 1921 election and at the end of 1922 it attracted another Liberal and an Independent, bringing its strength to eighteen in a House of fifty.[64] The newcomers included John Scaddan, who had been Labor Premier from 1910 to 1916; he had left the Labor Party over the conscription issue and, after a number of adventures, had joined the Liberal Party and the government. An extremely ambitious man, he then became the *de facto* leader of the Country Party and strongly resisted any attempts by the P.P.A. Executive to reassert its authority over the parliamentary group. In addition, he agreed with Mitchell that the Country Party's cabinet representatives should at all times place their loyalty to the government before their loyalty to the party, and when in 1922 Alex Monger, the P.P.A. President, began to take action to restore the party's independence he found in Scaddan a formidable opponent.

In 1921 and 1922 a combination of circumstances was to swing the balance in favour of Monger. Previously, the P.P.A. (and its predecessor, the F.S.A.) had been unwilling to do anything which might cause the Country Party to lose its cabinet representation, in other words, its means of influencing the policy of the State Wheat Board, which had given Westralian Farmers Limited the sole handling agency for the wheat crop. In 1922, however, this unwillingness was removed when the government scheme was wound up and Westralian Farmers organized a highly successful voluntary pool of its own. Besides, in 1921 both the Pastoralists' Association of Western Australia and the Chamber of Mines had affiliated with the P.P.A., each nominating two

[63] See a statement by H. K. Maley, *West Australian*, 22 Dec. 1923.

[64] The following members joined the Country Party between September 1920 and October 1922.

Member	*Previous party or status*	*Date of joining Country Party*	*Source: West Australian*
H. B. Lefroy	Liberal Party	Sept. 1920	17 Sept. 1920
E. H. Angelo	Liberal Party	Sept. 1920	17 Sept. 1920
M. P. Durack	Liberal Party	Nov. 1920	5 Nov. 1920
J. Scaddan	Liberal Party	Nov. 1920	5 Nov. 1920
W. R. Nairn	Liberal Party	Nov. 1920	5 Nov. 1920
J. H. Smith	Independent	Sept. 1922	27 Sept. 1922
J. Thomson	Liberal Party	Oct. 1922	10 Oct. 1922

members to its executive and, presumably, donating capital to its funds.[65] Both these groups had reason to be dissatisfied with Mitchell's administration, which they accused of being extravagant, thereby making increased taxation necessary, and of pursuing a dangerous land policy. The latter charge was directed against the 1922 Closer Settlement Bill, aimed at establishing a Land Acquisition Board with authority to suggest that a landowner should either sell unused land to the State or pay a triple land tax. Although rejected by the Legislative Council on constitutional grounds, this measure disturbed the big landowners and pastoralists and persuaded them to support the Country Party as a conservative counterweight to Mitchell's radicalism.[66]

The question of government extravagance was raised by Monger at a specially arranged meeting of the P.P.A. Executive and the Country Party in February 1922. On this occasion the P.P.A. president actually tried to insist that the Country Party ministers withdraw from the cabinet to indicate their disagreement with its financial policy. Scaddan opposed this suggestion, and a compromise resolution was adopted which wished the Premier well on his forthcoming visit to England but declared that on his return a similar meeting would be held to 'consider the future working arrangement with other parties supporting the Mitchell administration'.[67] Three other members of the parliamentary party, W. G. Pickering, A. Thomson and E. B. Johnston now began harrying Scaddan, voting against the ministry whenever a convenient opportunity offered, and in August, when Mitchell selected R. S. Sampson of the Country Party to take Broun's cabinet post and his portfolio, Thomson and T. H. Harrison resigned as deputy leader and leader of the parliamentary group in protest against the Premier's having overlooked them in making the appointment.[68] H. K. Maley, a cabinet member, was appointed leader in place of Harrison, but there was no disguising the fact that the real master of the party was Scaddan.

At the P.P.A.'s annual conference in August 1922, Monger asked the delegates to increase the executive's authority in its dealings with the parliamentary group. His main request was for the restoration of clause 51 of the F.S.A.'s original 1913 constitution, which had enabled the executive to convene a joint executive-party meeting, whose decision would bind the party, a clause which had been substantially amended by the 1916 F.S.A. conference. Since its readoption would have enabled the executive, thirty members strong in 1922, to outnumber the sixteen parliamentary members at a joint meeting, most

[65] *Primary Producer* (Perth), 2 Sept., 14 Oct. 1921.

[66] On the Bill, see Graham, 'The Political Strategies of the Australian Country Parties. From their Origins until 1929', pp. 505-6.

[67] Statement by H. K. Maley, *West Australian*, 9 Feb. 1924. See also ibid., 18 Feb. 1922; *Primary Producer*, 17 Feb. 1922.

[68] *Argus* (Melbourne), 1 Sept. 1922.

of the latter threatened to resign their seats rather than submit to such a rule, and after debate the clause was amended so that, in effect, the party would enjoy equal voting rights with the executive.[69] When the Labor Opposition raised the question of clause 51 in the Assembly, Scaddan again announced that he would place loyalty to Mitchell before the resolutions of the P.P.A. conference, and that he would not subject himself to the control of an outside organization.[70]

Monger's next move was to convene a joint meeting of executive and party members on 3 September. There he put forward detailed proposals (see p. 179) for improving the Country Party's position in the coalition alliance and for increasing the power of the Country Party leader over the choice of ministers from his party, proposals which were adopted by the meeting (though with some reluctance on the part of the parliamentarians) and conveyed to Mitchell by the Country Party leader, H. K. Maley. Writing to Monger on 13 September, the Premier took strong exception to clause 5 of the proposals which stipulated that any negotiations between the Country Party and other parties about coalition arrangements should be subject to the approval of a joint executive-party meeting. He described this as a 'departure from existing constitutional practice' and refused to consider the main proposals until it had been revoked. However, even though this was done,[71] Mitchell made no subsequent announcement about his willingness to accept the other recommendations.

This unsatisfactory state of affairs was cited by Monger in a letter which he wrote to the P.P.A.'s district and provincial councils on 9 January 1923, proposing that a meeting of their delegates be held to consider a new plan for further increasing the executive's power over the party.[72] His main suggestion was that the selection of Country Party candidates for the next State election be undertaken by a special Selection Committee constituted as shown in the table on p. 216.

In other words, of the twenty-nine members of the proposed committee, seventeen would be directly appointed by the executive as against ten by the district and provincial councils of the association. Here was a plea for executive dominance, not only over the parliamentary party but over the branch organization proper. In fact, the extreme nature of Monger's proposal told against him when the meeting of delegates was held in March, and the leader of the parliamentary party, Maley, was reported to have made an impression by declaring: 'We cannot take an oath of allegiance to you. We take oaths to the King and to Cabinet, so there is much that we cannot tell you, though we might like to do so.'

[69] P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1922, pp. 15-16; *West Australian*, 10, 11 Aug. 1922.

[70] *W.A. P.D.*, vol. 66, 15, 16 Aug. 1922, pp. 208-54.

[71] See *West Australian*, 23 Nov. 1923; 23 Sept. 1922.

[72] Ibid., 19 Dec. 1923.

Body represented	*Electing body*	*Totals*
One member for each district council (7)	District councils	7
One member for each provincial council (3)	Provincial councils	3
One member for each Assembly constituency without a district council (12)	P.P.A. Executive	12
One member for each Legislative Council constituency without a provincial council (1)	P.P.A. Executive	1
Pastoralists' Association	Pastoralists' Association	1
Chamber of Mines	Chamber of Mines	1
P.P.A. Executive	P.P.A. Executive	4
	Total	29

Following assurances that the parliamentary party would co-operate with the executive in future, it was decided that the Selection Committee question should be considered by a joint executive-party meeting, which would in turn report to the annual P.P.A. conference later in the year.[73] However, Maley and the other members of the parliamentary group were shaken by Monger's attempt to form a Selection Committee, and they decided at least to make a show of bringing pressure to bear on Mitchell. On 11 April a party meeting decided that Maley should inform the Premier that 'the working arrangement with the present Government' would terminate with the existing parliament, that the Country Party would stand as a separate identity with its own policy at the next elections, and that the party's 'position with regard to the future Government of the State [would] be considered and determined by the Country Party immediately following the next general elections'.[74] Having discussed these resolutions with members of the Liberal and National Labor Parties, Mitchell wrote to Maley complaining that the Country Party's proposals had made 'the carrying on of the Government of the country by present Ministers impossible', because the Country Party would disclaim responsibility for policies it had framed and helped to put through Parliament. He threatened that unless the Country Party accepted full responsibility for government policy at that time and during the election, he would request a dissolution of Parliament. The Country Party, which met on 9 May, had no heart for a snap election and approved a letter to Mitchell which, while expressed in strong language, conceded the essential points. 'My fellow party Ministers and myself,' wrote Maley, setting out the Country Party's position,

> by remaining in the Ministry for the life of the present Parliament, must necessarily agree to the responsibilities of government up to

[73] Ibid., 22, 23 Mar., 22 Dec. 1923. [74] Ibid., 10 May 1923.

> that point and subsequently during the period of the general elections, presuming always that common agreement will be sought for any extension of the present policy of development as we know it to-day. If that is not so, the position is that the resolutions conveyed to you are a direct motion of no-confidence in its Ministers by their own party. If such is not the position, my party claim the right to stand before the electors as a distinct political entity.

Maley went on to assure Mitchell that, if necessary, the Country Party would support a National Party government in power until the elections, and that the Premier would therefore not be justified in asking for a dissolution. Satisfied that the Country Party had agreed to share the responsibility for government policy in the election, a subsequent meeting of the Liberal and National Labor Parties accepted the original resolutions.[75]

At the September conference of the P.P.A., however, Monger again asked for power to enable the executive to correct weaknesses in the Country Party's position in the current coalition alliance.[76] His detailed proposals, which were debated behind closed doors and, according to subsequent reports,[77] strongly opposed by some of the parliamentarians, do not appear to have been accepted—certainly, nothing more was heard of the monolithic Selection Committee idea. The extent of the opposition appears to have surprised Monger, and rather than risk a test vote in the open session, he secured the withdrawal of a resolution proposing that the executive be given almost complete control over the parliamentary group.[78] But although this conference was not a success from the executive's point of view, the party constitution still vested that body with considerable power over the parliamentary members, particularly at election time. It had the sole right to endorse and select candidates for those constituencies where no P.P.A. district councils existed, and the right to cancel a nomination or withhold endorsement of candidates who were chosen by district councils. When the party's morale had been high, these rights had not been important, but by 1923 the party was in poor organizational health; a decline in branch strength had reduced the number of district councils in operation from ten in 1917, to eight in 1920 and to seven in 1923,[79] with the result that the P.P.A. Executive found that eleven of the sitting Country Party members would have

[75] Ibid., 10, 16 May, 22 Dec. 1923. Quote from 10 May.

[76] P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1923, pp. 5-12 and 30-3.

[77] *West Australian*, 14 Nov. 1923.

[78] P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1923, pp. 74-5.

[79] *West Australian*, 19, 28 June 1917; 5 Nov. 1920; 4 Dec. 1923; *Primary Producer*, 16 Nov. 1923. Branch figures for this period are scarce, but a 1916 list gives a total of 206 (*Sunday Times*, 16 Jan. 1916, p. 22) and one for 1919 gives 163 (W.A. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1919, pp. 53-6). The decline was most pronounced in the south-west.

to apply to it for re-endorsement in the coming elections. This was the weapon it chose to use.

A showdown could no longer be avoided. On 9 October the executive asked the parliamentary party to submit to Mitchell a plan for reorganizing the Industries Assistance Board, and requested written assurances from Mitchell that their proposals would be put into effect. A large group of parliamentarians attended the next executive meeting on 7 November and had the original resolution amended to request 'definite' rather than 'written' assurances from Mitchell. The proceedings were heated, and matters were not improved by Maley's demand that an apology should be made to one of the party's three elected representatives on the executive for accusations of disloyalty made against him at the previous meeting.

> Time and again during the discussion . . . [Monger] is said to have remarked that the day had come when the Country Party might be smaller in numbers, but, at the same time, it would comprise men who would stand loyally behind the executive.
>
> That utterance had a special significance for some of the Parliamentarians, who were told in ominous asides before they left the room, that they were marked men.[80]

Once the Country Party's parliamentary members had left the meeting, the executive decided against endorsing for the coming election C. C. Maley (Irwin), E. H. Angelo (Gascoyne), J. S. Denton (Moore), and R. S. Sampson (Swan). In protest, H. K. Maley wrote on 12 November asking that his own nomination for Greenough be withdrawn, a protest supported by the parliamentary party on the 20th by sixteen votes to six, Pickering, Thomson and Johnston, M.L.As., and W. Carroll, F. E. S. Willmott and C. F. Baxter, M.L.Cs., constituting the minority.[81]

In December the division between the two sides grew steadily wider, those members who had supported Maley calling themselves the Majority Country Party (M.C.P.), and those who supported the executive's stand taking the name Executive Country Party (E.C.P.). As the sole representatives of the E.C.P. in the Legislative Assembly, Pickering, Thomson and Johnston became:

> Three blind mice,
> Three blind mice;
> They're in the fun,
> They're in the fun.
> The Executive's after the Country Party,
> To put in the boots both good and hearty;
> But the only followers they can get
> Are three blind mice.[82]

[80] *West Australian*, 14 Nov. 1923.

[81] *Primary Producer*, 16, 23 Nov. 1923; *West Australian*, 13 Nov. 1923.

[82] Ibid., 28 Nov. 1923.

On 13 December an executive meeting accepted H. K. Maley's resignation and cancelled the endorsements of C. G. Latham (York) and T. H. Harrison (Avon).[83] In January 1924 H. K. Maley was chosen as leader of the M.C.P. and Thomson as leader of the E.C.P.[84]

In the election of 22 March 1924 the E.C.P. scored a notable success. Although Pickering lost Sussex to a Nationalist candidate, Thomson and Johnston retained Katanning and Williams-Narrogin respectively; these two seats were located in the wheat belt, where the P.P.A. branches were numerous and where the E.C.P. also won Toodyay, Avon, Beverley and Pingelly, defeating three of the outgoing M.C.P. members in the process. The M.C.P. retained two seats in the wheat belt, however, and returned five members elsewhere. Judging by the manner in which preferences were distributed, the struggle between the two country parties was not particularly intense at the local level; in Irwin, Toodyay and Beverley, for example, E.C.P. preferences drifted to M.C.P. candidates to a surprising extent. In Greenough, an inefficient transfer of E.C.P. preferences to the M.C.P. candidate enabled Labor to win the seat, but in Avon an E.C.P. nominee defeated his Labor rival with the aid of M.C.P. preferences.[85] The election gave Labor, with a strength of twenty-seven members, a majority in the new Assembly, and Mitchell's resignation cleared the way for a Labor government with Philip Collier as Premier. Immediately after the poll, the state of the non-Labor parties was: National Party 9, National Labor 1, E.C.P. 6 and M.C.P. 7. In December 1924, the M.C.P. members joined with the National and National Labor men in forming a single United Party,[86] with which the E.C.P., having resumed the title 'Country Party', established close relations.

Why had the party divided? Monger's explanation was that the members who eventually aligned themselves with the M.C.P. had resisted his attempts to restore the parliamentary group's independence within the coalition alliance and to reassert the traditional principle that the party should be responsible to the P.P.A. Executive and, through it, to rural interests at large. The executive's stand was based on the principle that future coalitions should be arranged on a definite basis, with the rights and responsibilities of each party clearly established, rather than on any objection to the coalition strategy as such.[87] On the other hand, H. K. Maley claimed that his group had broken with the executive on the two issues of coalitions and outside control; he said that whereas the M.C.P. stood for coalitions with the Nationalists, the executive had favoured 'the balance of power business —power without responsibility'. Over the years, he pointed out, the executive had fallen under the influence of powerful interests, such

[83] Ibid., 15 Dec. 1923.

[84] Ibid., 11, 18 Jan. 1924.

[85] See Graham, op. cit., table on p. 548.

[86] *West Australian*, 18 Dec. 1924.

[87] See the following statements by Monger: ibid., 22 Nov. 1923; 21 Feb. 1924; P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1924, pp. 6-9

as the St George's Terrace farmers, the Pastoralists' Association, and the Chamber of Mines, which had tried to force the parliamentary party to obey their instructions. 'So far as he was personally concerned . . . there would be no dancing to a political tune called in a St. George's-terrace office. They would not be Monger's marionettes.'[88]

Both explanations contain part of the truth. In institutional terms, the main cause of tension was the attempt by the P.P.A. Executive to re-establish organizational control over a parliamentary party which had not experienced such control for almost six years and which had become so accustomed to its status as a ministerial faction that it was reluctant to accept reform. Had it been a party in opposition the executive might have achieved some success, but the most able parliamentary leaders were already cabinet members who owed their position and power to Mitchell. They were therefore reluctant to undertake a crusade for revising the coalition agreement, particularly since Mitchell's views made it likely that such a crusade would lead to a major political crisis and possibly to the dissolution of parliament and a snap election. As we have seen, however, H. K. Maley was finally impressed with the need to test the possibility of some adjustments of the governmental alliance, and made moves in this direction in mid-1923. Mitchell's refusal to make concessions cut short this experiment but, had the executive shown more patience, a coalition agreement more like the Bruce-Page model might have been arranged after the 1924 elections. Why then had the executive been so hurried and inflexible in its dealings with the parliamentary party towards the end of 1923? Here Maley's point about the influence of the powerful pressure groups is relevant; Monger's impatience betrayed the fact that the leaders of the Pastoralists' Association were still grumbling about the need for retrenchment in public finance and for an end to plans for land reform.

The leaders in this situation were unable to rise above their differences and were too readily driven into extreme positions. Monger was at his most stubborn and inflexible in this period and the more dedicated country party men amongst the parliamentarians, such as Charles Latham, had yet to make their mark. H. K. Maley was a hesitant leader, hampered by his cabinet rank and his closeness to Mitchell, and Scaddan (who did not stand for re-election in 1924) fought as a political opportunist to minimize the influence of the P.P.A. Executive over the parliamentary party until a very late stage. The three 'blind mice', whose defection from the party did so much to strengthen the executive's hand in November and December 1923, were not motivated entirely by a concern for principle; Thomson, for example, may have hankered after a cabinet place, which Mitchell could have given him during the minor reconstruction of August

[88] *West Australian*, 22 Dec. 1923. See also his statements: 22, 24 Nov., 1 Dec. 1923; 19 Jan., 9 Feb. 1924.

1922. In April 1921 Thomson had actually written to the Premier expressing the hope that the location of his electorate (Katanning) would not debar him 'from realising one of my ambitions, namely, to attain Cabinet rank'.[89]

At the branch level, opinion had been overwhelmingly in favour of the E.C.P., except where certain M.C.P. members, such as Latham, enjoyed a loyal personal following. The preference for the E.C.P. was undoubtedly due to the fact that, for the rank and file, the real choice became one between a party responsible to the P.P.A. and one which was not, and they naturally preferred the former. Six of the seven district councils and the great majority of the branches gave their backing to E.C.P. candidates during the election campaign of 1924; those which did not do so regarded the E.C.P. as a threat to anti-Labor unity or as the instrument of the 'St George's Terrace farmers' and the Pastoralists' Association.[90]

Seen in the context of the Australian Country Party movement as a whole, the Western Australian crisis appears as an incident of a very special kind. Here was a case in which a country party had formed a coalition agreement before the era of the formal and carefully regulated settlements ushered in by the Bruce-Page concordat of February 1923. Monger and the P.P.A. Executive, despite their lack of patience, were in the broader sense insisting on the appropriateness of the eastern strategy to Western Australian conditions. With the formation of the E.C.P. and its survival in the 1924 elections, the ground was cleared for a new start—even though the reformed party had to wait six years for another glimpse of power.

Commonwealth: The Federal Country Party Faces Problems of Alliance and Policy

In the last resort, the acceptance or rejection of the coalition strategy by the State country parties in Australia depended on whether the

[89] Quoted by Mitchell, *W.A. P.D.*, vol. 70, 21 Aug. 1924, p. 481.

[90] For the reaction of branches in the Pingelly electorate, and for the subsequent decision of the Pingelly District Council to back the executive, see the *Pingelly Leader*, 3, 10 Jan. 1924.

The Nelson District Council withdrew its nomination from J. H. Smith (M.C.P.) on the advice of the executive. See the *Bunbury Herald*, 15 Jan. 1924.

By the president's casting vote, the Albany District Council decided to support the two M.C.P. candidates offering (see *West Australian*, 23 Jan. 1924) and the Wagin District Council decided against supporting S. Stubbs (M.C.P.) by eleven votes to six (ibid., 24 Dec. 1924).

The lists of branches supporting the executive were given from time to time in the *West Australian*, and they far outnumbered those backing the M.C.P. Some branches did disband in protest against the executive's action (P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1925, p. 20).

Bruce-Page arrangement enabled the Federal Country Party to retain its separate identity and produce good results for rural interests.

Throughout the 1923-5 Parliament the alliance worked well. On most occasions the two parties voted together and their members' speeches were consistent in tone and argument, a unanimity which prompted Bruce to speak of 'a united Ministerial party'.[91] However, Page emphasized that 'outside this Parliament, there are three separate political parties, and three separate political organizations responsible to and representing three separate political constituencies'.[92] Each of the government parties used to meet separately, and after August 1923, when Page explained his Land Tax Assessment Bill to a National Party meeting,[93] it became the practice for ministers in charge of important measures to explain them to each party meeting in turn. The two parts of the cabinet worked together without difficulty, and between September 1923 and March 1924 Page acted as Prime Minister while Bruce attended the Imperial Conference. Perhaps the only real note of disharmony was caused by the resignation of Percy Stewart in August 1924 as a protest against the adoption of an election pact (which we shall discuss shortly), but even he appears to have worked smoothly with his colleagues until that date.

Bruce and Page had discussed the possibility of an electoral alliance during their conversations of February 1923 (pp. 192-3). No action was taken that year, but early in 1924 a series of incidents in State politics brought the issue of electoral relations to the forefront. The first of these occurred in January when Labor won the Dalhousie by-election in Victoria, because, according to the National Party, a V.F.U. candidate had intervened without leave. As a result, the Victorian Country Party was obliged to consider the possibility of forming electoral alliances with the Nationalists in future elections, but the idea was rejected by the V.F.U. Conference in March 1924, with the qualification that the prohibition did not apply to the Federal Country Party, 'responsible to the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation, and not to any State organisation' (see pp. 199-201). In March, too, the clash of the Ministerial and Executive Country Parties in the Western Australian State election was cited by the Federal Nationalists as one of the reasons for the success of the Labor Party and the subsequent formation of the Collier government. Finally, in the South Australian election of 5 April 1924, candidates of the Country Party Association (C.P.A.) split the non-Labor vote in the rural electorates of Wooroora, Burra Burra, Barossa and Flinders, thereby enabling Labor to win seven extra seats and to take office with 27 members in a House of 46.

[91] *C.P.D.*, vol. 102, 1 Mar. 1923, p. 79.

[92] Ibid., 8 Mar. 1923, p. 242.

[93] *Argus*, 17 Aug. 1923. Also interview with Sir Earle Page, Canberra, 9 May 1956.

Only two Country Party candidates were returned, both in a constituency where no Labor nominees were offering.

The outcry over these results gave Bruce the pretext he needed to press for an electoral pact between the Federal National and Country Parties, something he had long had in mind. He stated at Adelaide on 20 May:

> If the two parties are to fight each other at the next election, it would be obviously necessary for the two leaders to come out and enunciate the policies of their respective parties. It is, however, impossible for the Prime Minister and Treasurer in one Ministry, sharing jointly all Cabinet responsibilities, to enunciate two different policies to the country.
>
> It would, therefore, be necessary before an election took place for the Treasurer, with the other Country party Ministers, to resign from the Ministry, and I, as the Prime Minister, to make up my Cabinet from my own direct supporters. In the event, however, of the election resulting in parties being returned to the new House on approximately the same basis as they are now, it would be impossible for me to form a composite Ministry again, as this would involve the discarding of Ministers who had just shared with me the heat and burden of a general election. Surely it would be absurd when a Government had functioned successfully up to the brink of an election that it should be broken up—with no hope of it being reformed —because of a desire on the part of the two parties supporting the Ministry to fight each other in an election on minor issues when they are absolutely united on every major question of national policy.

Bruce made it quite clear that he considered a 'multiplicity' of parties at the federal level unnecessary, and that he expected the Country Party to observe the conventions of an executive government based on British notions of collective responsibility. Moreover, he refused to consider modifying those conventions to appease such of the Country Party's members as hoped that the party would retain its electoral independence.[94]

On 30 May the newspapers published the terms of a provisional electoral alliance which Bruce and Page wished their parties to accept. This proposed that at any election held while the Coalition Ministry was in office, provided that there had been an agreement on policy, the two parties should refrain from contesting each other's electorates and, in the case of a Labor electorate, should try to select from whichever party was strongest in that area a single candidate whom they would both support. If, notwithstanding, Country Party and Nationalist candidates were nominated in the same electorate, it was proposed that they should advise their supporters to exchange preferences; and where it could be arranged, it was suggested that joint teams consist-

[94] *Argus*, 21 May 1924. See also an earlier speech by Bruce (ibid., 22 Apr. 1924) and an address by Page at Dalby on 30 April 1924 (Rt Hon. E. C. G. Page, 'Speeches', 1924).

ing of Nationalist (two) and Country Party (one) candidates should be nominated for the Senate elections.[95] These proposals aroused immediate protests both from the V.F.U.'s radicals, who regarded them as an attempt to undermine the independence of the party, and from the conservative members of the New South Wales, Western Australian, and South Australian organizations, who felt that the party should not be prevented from winning additional seats from the Nationalists.

The proposed alliance was considered by the parliamentary parties on 29 May, by a conference of the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation (A.F.F.O.) on 16 and 17 June, and by parallel meetings of the A.F.F.O. and the Executive of the Australian National Federation (the Nationalists' federal organization) between 19 and 23 July.[96] From the outset, Percy Stewart tried to make amends for his docility during the coalition negotiations of January-February 1923. He organized a strong campaign for the removal of the so-called 'immunity' provisions, those which would have prevented the country parties from contesting federal electorates held by Nationalists, and claimed that the pact would endanger the party's separate identity and commit it to an anti-Labor role in politics. Thus shackled, its influence on policy would inevitably decline. He won support at the two A.F.F.O. conferences from some of the V.F.U.'s representatives, from the delegates of the South Australian C.P.A. and from those of the Western Australian P.P.A., who claimed that the pact would prevent the party from expanding and that an agreement on policy would make the demand for a revenue tariff (which they supported) a non-party issue rather than a special part of Country Party policy. Page took a firm line against Stewart, insisting that the Country Party would gain more policy concessions by joining coalitions than by bargaining from outside the cabinet, and that the continuance of the existing ministry should therefore be ensured by an electoral alliance. He maintained that the party would still expand by winning seats from Labor and stressed that the pact offered it an opportunity to elect representatives to the Senate. He was supported at the A.F.F.O. conferences by the representatives of the New South Wales F.S.A., by those of the Queensland United Cane Growers' Association, and by a portion of the divided V.F.U. delegation.

In a determined effort to discourage opposition, Bruce and Page had both let it be known that they would resign from the cabinet and

[95] *Argus*, 30 May 1924.

[96] For an extremely full account of these conferences, complete with references to the A.F.F.O. Minutes, see Ellis, *History of the Australian Country Party*, pp. 122-9. See also *Argus*, 17, 18, 19 June, 19, 21, 22, 23 July 1924; *S.M.H.*, 17 June 1924; *Age*, 17 June 1924; *West Australian*, 24 July 1924; *Farmers' Advocate*, 20 June 1924; *Countryman* (Melb.), 25 July, 8 Aug., 3 Oct. 1924, 13 Mar. 1925; *Primary Producer*, 20 June 1924; W.A. P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1924, p. 55.

from the leadership of their respective parties unless the pact were endorsed. Even so, the delegates to the first A.F.F.O. Conference were unable to agree on their attitude to the pact, and a serious break was avoided only by the question of its acceptance being held over until the second conference in July. By the time of this meeting, opposition had somewhat abated but the delegates still insisted on some modification of the so-called 'immunity clause'. A meeting of the representatives of the A.F.F.O. and of the National Federation Executive, held with Bruce's consent on 23 July, made the following recommendations to the party leaders: that the immunity provisions be relaxed to enable the Country Party to contest the Nationalist seats of Bendigo and Corio, and the National Party to put up candidates in in the Country Party seats of Gippsland, Riverina and Richmond; that the local organizations themselves be permitted to settle the problem of selecting a candidate or candidates for such Labor seats as Wannon; and that Tasmania be excluded from the pact in view of the fact that the Country Party's organization in that State was not yet affiliated with the A.F.F.O.[97]

On 5 August, Bruce cut short speculation about his intentions by announcing after a cabinet meeting that he was prepared to accept the proposed modifications to the pact. Stewart, who had been driven to take a progressively more extreme position in the course of the previous months' negotiations, chose this moment to resign from the government and J. H. Prowse (Swan) gave up his post as the Country Party's whip: the gaps were quickly filled by the appointment of W. C. Hill to the cabinet, and J. A. J. Hunter (Maranoa) as whip.[98] Although Stewart remained within the Country Party until 1926 and was said to have assured Page that he would continue to support the government as a private member,[99] he became more outspoken in his opposition to the pact and to the anti-Labor policy in general. The Prime Minister, he claimed, regarded the pact as the first step towards the absorption of the Country Party, and had insisted on his (Stewart's) resignation from the cabinet if he did not support it. In his view it was essential that the Country Party should return to its former independence, shunning the policy of anti-Labor alliances.[1] Had he made this stand in February 1923 instead of joining the ministry, his protest would have had more weight, as also would his complaint at a party 'smoko' in September 1924 that:

> We, the fighters of yesterday, the policemen of politics, are now sitting at the feet of the Nationalists, striking the chords of harmony

[97] *Argus*, 24 July 1924.

[98] Ibid., 6, 7, 9 Aug. 1924.

[99] Ibid., 11 Aug. 1924.

[1] See his statements, *Countryman* (Melb.), 8 Aug., 3 Oct. 1924, 13 Mar. 1925; *Country News* (Adelaide), 13 Sept. 1924.

on the harps that have been given us in place of our swords, and singing 'Love Me and the World is Mine.' And we who refuse to join in this chorus are regarded as rebels.[2]

The National Party's organizations (apart from one or two who stood to lose seats to the Country Party) accepted the election pact without question, but the farmers' organizations were much less tractable.[3] Delegates at the August conference of the New South Wales F.S.A., while endorsing the alliance, nevertheless felt that Page had exceeded his powers in making the arrangement and expressed fears for the party's separate identity.[4] In September, the South Australian C.P.A. accepted the pact by 39 votes to 21,[5] but the Western Australian P.P.A. refused to follow suit on the grounds that the Nationalists in that State were opposed to the idea of including a Country Party nominee in their Senate team, and that the tariff issue would be shelved to obtain a joint election policy. In May 1925, however, the local United Party resolved the impasse by offering a Country Party candidate a place in the Ministerial Senate team, an offer which was accepted by the P.P.A. Executive, both organizations agreeing to press 'for a return to saner tariff conditions'. This limited agreement was accepted by the Association's annual conference in August 1925, though only after a spirited debate.[6]

Strengthened by Stewart's break with Page, the radical faction in the V.F.U. broadened its attack to take in not only the election pact but the coalition strategy in general. While John Allan and the V.F.U. president, W. G. Pickering, did their best to defend the federal arrangement, Isaac Hart obtained the approval of 107 of the 306 V.F.U. branches for the radicals' suggestion that the Central Council be required to convene a special general conference to discuss the matter.[7] Although this request was strictly in accordance with the Union's constitution, which ruled that an extraordinary conference should be held if demanded by no fewer than one-third of the branches,[8] the Central Council refused to convene one on the grounds that the matter in dispute had already been settled at the V.F.U. conference in March 1924, which had recognized the authority of the A.F.F.O. over the electoral arrangements of the federal party.[9] At the

[2] *Argus*, 24 Sept. 1924.

[3] On the reaction of the State Country Parties, see Ellis, *History of the Australian Country Party*, pp. 132-9.

[4] See N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1924, pp. 94-110.

[5] *Country News*, 13 Sept. 1924.

[6] See W.A. P.P.A. *Conference Reports*, 1924, pp. 51-8; 1925, pp. 5-7; *West Australian*, 15, 21, 23, 26 May, 11, 13 Aug. 1925; *Countryman* (Melb.), 12 Sept. 1924.

[7] Ibid., 3 Oct. 1924.

[8] See *Victorian Farmers' Union, Constitution and Rules*, 1922, p. 8.

[9] *Countryman* (Melb.), 3 Oct. 1924.

Union's annual conference in March 1925, the radical delegates succeeded merely in pushing through a resolution against the formation of future electoral alliances which implied acceptance of the present one.[10]

As with the formation of the federal coalition, so with the electoral alliance, Page had begun by concluding a personal agreement with Bruce and had then virtually bullied the State country party organizations into accepting it, despite their misgivings. His success was due to his ability to appeal beyond the narrow limits of the party's organizational structure to its ordinary voters amongst the mass of farmers and country townsmen. Within the party itself, the struggle between Page and Stewart had taken on the character of a doctrinal debate about the merits of the coalition strategy, but it had assumed a much more personal aspect for country electors at large. For them the question had not been whether Page was acting with strict regard for the Country Party's rules or with sufficient thought for its long-term electoral and parliamentary independence but whether, by means of the coalition, he would be able to realize tangible benefits for country interests. Stewart had been judged by the same criterion: if the Country Party followed his advice and did not form alliances, would it then be able to influence policy as directly as if it were a member of a coalition? It had become a question of whose judgment was more to be relied upon, Page's or Stewart's, and Page had won his victory within the Country Party by convincing country electors that his was the strategy which could best satisfy their interests.

It was for this reason that, from the very formation of the coalition, the Country Party ignored Nationalist protests and broke the conventions of ministerial responsibility by claiming certain of the government's measures as being due to its influence. In view of the need for 'active propaganda . . . to keep prominently before the people of Australia the actual work that is being accomplished by the party', there was formed a special committee consisting of one Federal Country Party member from each State 'for the purpose of preparing a weekly statement for publication in all newspapers, especially those circulating in country districts'.[11] The party's ministers, and Page in particular, lost no opportunity of labelling pieces of legislation as their own. In some cases, credit was warranted. As Postmaster-General, W. G. Gibson ensured that rural telephone services were developed much more rapidly than hitherto[12] and it was generally accepted that the Country Party was mainly responsible for the Main Roads Development Acts of 1923, 1924 and 1925, which provided annual grants of £500,000 on a pound for pound basis to assist the State governments in developing main roads. Moreover, as Treasurer, Page

[10] Ibid., 13, 20 Mar. 1925.

[11] Hobart *Mercury*, 6 July 1923.

[12] See Graham, 'Strategies of the Australian Country Parties', p. 718.

helped in 1925 to establish the Rural Credits Department of the Commonwealth Bank to provide credit for co-operative and other marketing bodies.[13]

However, the Country Party was often not above claiming credit for policies which had either been initiated under the previous administration or were ones which any government would have adopted, given the logic of the situation and the representations of the affected pressure groups. In actual fact, Page agreed with Bruce that co-operative marketing organizations should pay their own way and should not receive financial assistance from the government;[14] however, he was quite prepared to make political capital out of those occasions when the government was forced to continue the special support policies of the previous administration. To give some examples, after almost continuous pressure from fruit farmers and canneries, both proprietary and co-operative, the government finally passed legislation in 1924 to subsidize the export of canned fruit;[15] in the same year, continued over-production in the fruit industry dictated the formation of an Export Control Board for dried fruits, exports of which were subsidized; the subsidy on beef exports, first provided by Hughes in 1922, was renewed in 1923, and in 1924 an Australian Meat Council was organized to provide additional subsidies for beef exports from a levy on meat sold in the local market; the embargo on imported sugar was continued, in the first instance to June 1925 and in the second to June 1928; and, as a result of a campaign for price stabilization in dairy marketing initiated by the Queensland Council of Agriculture and supported by the V.F.U. and the New South Wales F.S.A., the government set up a Dairy Produce Export Control Board in 1924 to supervise the export and sale of dairy produce.[16] In nearly every one of these cases, the decisions taken were either a response to administrative necessity or a concession to the demands of well-organized pressure groups, but the Country Party ever afterwards presented them as the products of a systematic and orderly policy.[17]

The wheatgrowers, whose industry could not be aided by such

[13] Sir Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp. 118-20.

[14] In a draft of one of his parliamentary speeches in June 1925, Page wrote: 'This Government's policy is to encourage the organisation of each industry to put itself in a sound position where it can permanently rely on its own initiative and handle its own affairs.' (Page, 'Speeches', 1925, draft speech for the debate on the compulsory wheat pool proposal, dated 24 June 1925.) See also statements by Bruce (*Argus*, 6 Apr. 1923), Austin Chapman (ibid., 8 Aug. 1923) and Page (ibid., 13 Oct. 1923).

[15] Canned Fruit Bounty Act, 1924. For the representations of the pressure groups see *Argus*, 13 Oct., 14-16, 20, 30 Nov., 22 Dec. 1923.

[16] Dairy Produce Export Control Act, 1924. See *Farmers' Advocate*, 22 Feb. 1924; *Argus*, 10 Apr. 1924.

[17] See for example 'The Federal Composite Government. The First Session's Record. Summary of Measures Passed', Melbourne, 1923.

improvisation, were not so easily impressed by Country Party claims. Bruce did arrange with the Commonwealth Bank to provide a guarantee of 3s. 8d. per bushel to assist the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian and Western Australian voluntary wheat pools operate in the 1923-4 season[18] (as the Hughes administration had done for the 1921-2 and 1922-3 seasons) but he refused to provide a further guarantee for the 1924-5 season when the States failed to meet his condition of forming a single chartering and selling agency.[19] The latter season was an exceptionally good one, with a plentiful harvest and high overseas prices, but it was also the season in which the proportion of the crop handled by three of the four voluntary pools dropped sharply, thereby causing small growers to feel concerned about the security of their market. The pool's share dropped from 33 to 25 per cent in New South Wales, from 60 to 34 per cent in Victoria and from 33 to 12·5 per cent in South Australia; only in Western Australia did it increase, from 40 to 45 per cent.[20] By now the lesson of the wartime wheat pool had been firmly learnt by the wheatgrowers, many of whom felt that some form of compulsory marketing organization had to be reinstituted, preferably under producers' control but certainly backed by government authority and funds. Although in March 1925 an A.F.F.O. conference called for such an organization,[21] Stewart was the only Country Party parliamentarian to support a motion, brought forward by a Labor member in June, that the Commonwealth government should negotiate with the States with a view to establishing a compulsory pool. The remaining Country Party members either argued that there was not the constitutional basis for a compulsory pool or, like Gregory and Page, agreed with Bruce that compulsory pooling was wrong in principle.[22]

Nor did the Federal Country Party make any obvious effort to check the established policy of granting increased protection to Australian industries, despite the pleas of its revenue tariffist and free trade supporters in Western and South Australia. The Tariff Board, formed in 1922 to assist and advise the Minister for Trade and Customs, began to play what amounted to a policy-making role under the Bruce-Page administration, and, as Page himself observed, it 'always tried to conserve the interests of Australian manufacturers'.[23] The

[18] *C.P.D.*, vol. 103, 27 June 1923, pp. 334-5.

[19] See *V.P.D.*, vol. 167, 3 Sept. 1924, pp. 204-5, for Bruce's letter to the Victorian Premier, Michael Prendergast, on this subject. See also *Argus*, 16 Sept. 1924; *S.M.H.*, 16 Sept. 1924; *S.A.P.D.*, 1924, vol. 1, pp. 1210-12; *C.P.D.*, vol. 109, 16 Sept. 1924, p. 4360.

[20] Millar Smith, *The Marketing of Australian and New Zealand Primary Products*, p. 245.

[21] *Countryman* (Melb.), 27 Mar. 1925.

[22] *C.P.D.*, vol. 110, 19 June 1925, pp. 283-98; 24 June 1925, pp. 306-60.

[23] *Argus*, 21 Feb. 1924.

implications of this bias were driven home to primary producers in 1925 when, having conducted an enquiry into the costs of producing agricultural machinery in Australia, the Board recommended that the existing duties on imported machinery be retained,[24] advice which the government accepted despite the demands of farmers' organizations that the duties should be removed and manufacturers protected by means of a bonus.[25] It is hard to see how the Country Party could be described as having launched 'a frontal attack' on protection during this period.[26] Not only were its members divided on the tariff issue (for example J. T. H. Whitsitt and V. C. Thompson were protectionists while Gregory and Prowse were revenue tariffists) but its ministers were also anxious to ensure that the party avoided extreme stands on the subject. Gregory, who spoke out against the existing policy whenever he could, wrote to one of his constituents that his

> actions in Parliament tend to make him almost an outcast with his own party, who consider that the continued and incisive exposures of the methods of the Customs Department are most embarrassing to Country Party Ministers and for which twice have I been attacked in the party room by our own party. In fact, after recently moving the adjournment of the House on the dumping duty on netting, our party passed a resolution insisting that no member of the party should take any further action until the Government had dealt with the matter, I being the only dissentient.[27]

It is important to note that the budget surpluses for 1922-3, 1923-4 and 1924-5 which enabled Page, as Treasurer, to abolish the land tax on Crown leaseholds, to reduce income tax rates, and to grant the States £500,000 per annum for the development of main roads, were derived mainly from the large surpluses over estimated Customs and Excise Revenue in these years. Revenue from this source constituted 65·90 per cent of total Commonwealth revenue in the year 1922-3, 70·30 per cent in 1923-4, and 70·39 per cent in 1924-5,[28] which

[24] See 'Tariff Board, Annual Report, 30th June 1925', *C.P.P.*, 1925, vol. II, pp. 1872-3 and 1889-922.

[25] See for example N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Reports*, 1923, pp. 58-9; 1924, pp. 44-5; 1925, p. 21, and speeches in the House of Representatives by the following Country Party members: T. Paterson (*C.P.D.*, vol. 102, 8 Mar. 1923, p. 229), J. H. Prowse (ibid., vol. 104, 6 Aug. 1923, p. 2172), and H. Gregory (ibid., vol. 107, 24 July 1924, p. 2477).

[26] As suggested by Gordon Greenwood in 'Development in the Twenties'. *Australia. A Social and Political History*, p. 304.

[27] *Primary Producer*, 8 Aug. 1924. See also *C.P.D.*, vol. 106, 7 May 1924, pp. 431-43.

[28] Adapted from figures given in the 1925 Budget Papers, *C.P.P.*, 1925, vol. 2, p. 237. See Graham, 'Strategies of the Australian Country Parties', p. 726, and Appendix K of *The Australian Tariff, An Economic Enquiry*, pp. 181-3.

suggests that had Page reached the point of advocating tariff reductions he would also have been obliged to envisage increased levels of land and income taxation, the greater evil as far as he was concerned.

As a pallid substitute for a tariff policy, the Country Party produced its doctrine of 'all-round' protection, that is tariff assistance for the primary as well as the secondary industries. Page in effect advised the primary producers to stop fighting tariff increases and 'break into the vicious circle' themselves.[29] In practice, 'all-round' protection meant three forms of assistance to primary industries—tariffs on certain imports (such as maize, hops and sugar) in cases where local industries had a high cost-structure, subsidies on exports (as in the case of dried fruits), and a fair return for export produce such as wheat (that is Australian parity rather than prices on a par with those ruling in overseas markets). But while this approach pleased fruit, sugar and dairy farmers, for example, it meant very little to wheatgrowers and graziers, whose industries were chiefly dependent on export sales for their income. The longer the Country Party remained in government, the more difficulty it had in identifying itself with the free trade and revenue tariffist ideas which had served it so well in its first years.

Similarly, its advocacy of new states now became an embarrassment. In 1921 and 1922 Page had often spoken of the need for a federal constitutional convention which would alter the constitution to enable the Commonwealth government to create new states without the consent of the State governments concerned.[30] However, during the 1923-5 Parliament, although the Bruce-Page Ministry considered the question,[31] it neither introduced a bill to provide for such a convention nor held a referendum on the proposed constitutional amendments. Instead, Page diverted the attention of the new states movements in Queensland and New South Wales to objectives in state politics, by persuading them to put pressure on their State governments to investigate such matters as the boundaries of proposed new states before petitioning the Commonwealth government to take action. Two resolutions introduced in the House of Representatives by V. C. Thompson, the Country Party member for New England, requesting that a referendum be held on the proposed constitutional amendments, were never put to the vote.[32] A parliamentarian of this period told the writer that when Thompson made one of his several speeches on the subject, Hughes was heard to grumble that the Country Party, having no real interest in creating new states, was 'like a hen sitting on a

[29] See Page, 'Speeches', 1925 (Adelaide, 7 Sept. 1925), and his statement, N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1925, p. 70.

[30] See for example *S.M.H.*, 21 May 1921; *Argus*, 27 Oct. 1922.

[31] Ellis, *History of the Australian Country Party*, p. 111.

[32] See *C.P.D.*, vol. 107, 24 July 1924, p. 2452; vol. 111, 23 Sept. 1925, p. 2673.

china egg'. Thompson immediately rushed to the press gallery to ensure that the remark went no further.

Had the 1925 federal election been a normal occasion, the Country Party would have found itself fighting an uphill battle to convince advocates of a revenue tariff of a compulsory wheat pool, and of new states that their interests were being furthered by the coalition agreement. Instead, the poll was held in an atmosphere of crisis, and Bruce and Page went to the country asking that the government's hand be strengthened to deal with the threat of lawlessness and revolution. The trouble began in August 1925, when British seamen in Australian waters joined in a world-wide strike against the action of British shipowners in reducing their wages from £11 to £10 per month, and the Australian Seamen's Union struck in sympathy. Under the provisions of an Immigration Act passed in July, which enabled a three-man tribunal to recommend the deportation of any foreign-born person associated with a strike in the transport industry, police were ordered to arrest some of the Australian strike leaders. J. T. Lang, the Labor Premier of New South Wales, refused to permit State police to be used for this purpose and Bruce was obliged to use Commonwealth Police, who duly arrested the Sydney strike leaders, including Thomas Walsh and Jacob Johnson, president and secretary of the Seamen's Union.[33] The Commonwealth government obtained an early dissolution of Parliament, and asked for a special mandate to take further steps to restore law and order, on the grounds that the strike was intended as a prelude to Red Revolution. The theme was elaborated as the campaign developed. A National Federation poster in Melbourne depicted the Labor Party as a donkey ridden by a bearded Bolshevik holding a carrot on a string,[34] and in a Tasmanian advertisement a kangaroo watched revolutionaries shooting down citizens in front of a blazing church.[35]

Page's campaign style was well suited to this kind of situation, and he enjoyed contrasting the choice between the forces of law, the government parties, and the forces of revolution, by which he meant the Labor Party and the strike leaders. At Lismore he declared that 'the general issue' at stake was whether:

> Australia is to be governed by constitutional means . . . , or whether it is to be controlled by a small minority of foreign extremists who have managed to capture the trades union movement and are imposing their will on the political Labor Leaders and the executives of the unions and substituting rule by direct-action and by force and violence for the ordinary statutory law and practices of the country.

[33] Aaron Wildavsky, 'The 1926 Referendum', *Studies in Australian Politics*, pp. 8-9. See also J. T. Lang, *I Remember*, pp. 242-8.

[34] *Argus*, 29 Oct. 1925.

[35] Hobart *Mercury*, 12 Nov. 1925.

> . . . So far as the Prime Minister and myself are concerned, we have endeavoured by means of mutual give and take in the various electorates to try and confine the election issue to that general principle.[36]

Percy Stewart suggested, however, that there were other reasons for thus confining the scope of the campaign debate.

> One object for the sudden election was to nip in the bud certain opposition to the Federal pact which the Government feared was developing within the Country party. The Nationalist tacticians considered that a sudden election on the strike issue would force the recalcitrant Country party members in behind the Government, and distract the attention of the producers from the tariff, wheat pool, new States movement, and other issues which were threatening to disturb the harmony of the parties.[37]

The election took place on 14 November 1925 and resulted in the return of 37 Nationalists, 14 Country Party members, 1 Independent, and 23 Labor members. This was the Country Party's first real experience of an electoral alliance with the Nationalists, and the effect on its performance was most interesting. Country Party nominees were included in the ministerial teams for the Senate elections in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, and were elected in every case. In the elections to the House of Representatives, also, the organizations of the coalition parties worked together without much friction. In Western Australia, the P.P.A. and the United Party formed a joint Federal Ministerial Campaign Committee, which endorsed the government candidates and directed the campaign;[38] Prowse and Gregory retained their seats without Nationalist opposition on this occasion. In South Australia, the C.P.A. respected the pact by not nominating any candidates for the House of Representatives constituencies. In Tasmania there was no longer a country party organization: in August 1924 the Primary Producers' Association and the Farmers, Stockowners, and Orchardists' Association had formed a Country Party Producers' Political Federation, but this body had merged with the National Federation in January 1925 to form the Town and Country Political Federation, which had gone out of existence in the following April; the parliamentary Country Party, meanwhile, had lost its separate identity and amalgamated with the National Party after the State election in June.[39] As a result, the Federal Country Party members from Tasmania had to depend for support on the local National Party organizations, and the only man re-elected, L. Atkinson (Wilmot), stayed with the Country Party for

[36] Page, 'Speeches', Lismore, 11 Nov. 1925.

[37] *Argus*, 20 Oct. 1925.

[38] *West Australian*, 21 Sept., 2 Oct. 1925.

[39] See Hobart *Mercury*, 26 Aug. 1924, 23 Apr. 1925; Launceston *Examiner*, 26 Jan. 1925.

only a short period in the new parliament before joining the National Party.[40]

The election found the Queensland non-Labor groups, the Progressive Country Party and the National Party, on the verge of amalgamation, and their organizations formed a Federal Election Campaign Committee to concert their campaigns.[41] For the Country Party, J. A. J. Hunter was re-elected in Maranoa, but W. H. Doherty, secretary of the United Cane Growers' Association, failed in his attempt to win the seat of Capricornia from Labor. In New South Wales the Country Party retained Cowper, New England and Riverina without competition from the Nationalists and in turn refrained from nominating candidates in the National Party seats of Robertson, Eden-Monaro and Calare. Failing to agree on a single candidate, the local Nationalist and Country Party organizations both nominated candidates against the sitting members for Gwydir and Hume; Labor held Hume but lost Gwydir to the Country Party nominee, C. L. A. Abbott. In Richmond, excluded from the terms of the pact, the Country Party member (Roland Green) defeated a Nationalist challenge. In Victoria, the V.F.U. did not nominate candidates for the National Party seats of Bendigo, Corio and Flinders, and no Nationalists stood in Wimmera, Echuca, Indi and Corangamite, which were retained by the Country Party. An Independent Nationalist stood against Thomas Paterson, the Country Party member for Gippsland, but was defeated. Both Country Party and Nationalist nominees contested the Labor seat of Wannon, which was won by the Nationalist.

Taking a broad view of the campaign, the electoral alliance cut down the number of electorates in eastern Australia (excluding Tasmania) contested by both the non-Labor parties from 18 in 1922 to 5 in 1925. The saving in resources, and the increased efficiency of their campaign against Labor, must have been considerable. To what extent, however, did the alliance prevent the Country Party from expanding into new regions? A general answer would be that the pact gave the Country Party Senate representation, helped its members in States where it was weak (Tasmania and Queensland), gave it a breathing space in Western Australia, but weakened it slightly in Victoria, New South Wales and possibly in South Australia. Had there been no immunity clause, for example, the Country Party could have contested Robertson in New South Wales, Corio in Victoria, and Wakefield in South Australia with some chance of success. Further, having definitely accepted an anti-Labor role in the party system, the Country Party probably lost much of its left-wing support in this election, as is suggested by the fact that the proportion of Country Party preferences allocated to Labor in the Wannon contests of 1922 and 1925 fell from 38·3 to 24·3 per cent. It is doubtful, however, whether the Country Party's financial resources would have been

[40] See *Argus*, 26 June 1926.

[41] Brisbane *Courier*, 9 Oct. 1925

sufficient to enable it to have fought an independent campaign. According to one report, denied by Country Party officials, the National Union of Melbourne gave the V.F.U. £6,000 to help finance its campaign.[42]

The election victory of the federal non-Labor parties signified in one respect that the coalition arrangement had been approved, and that Page had another three years in which to ensure that the coalition strategy became Country Party orthodoxy. He could draw confidence from the fact that a similar coalition had been formed in Victoria and that the New South Wales and Western Australian Country Parties were likely to join coalitions if Labor were removed from office in their States. Some of the Country Party's most important groups, however, now had misgivings about the Country Party's ability to promote radical reforms in the fields of marketing, rural credit and the tariff. The wheatgrowers, the very section on which the party's electoral breakthrough had been based, were the most disturbed; for them the coalition strategy had still to pass the test of practical effectiveness.

[42] *Smith's Weekly* (Sydney), 6 Mar. 1926; *V.P.D.*, vol. 171, 8 Sept. 1926, pp. 1259-60; *Argus*, 10 Mar. 1926 (for the Country Party's denial).

7

Agrarian Discontent and Country Party Revivalism, 1925-1929

Economic Instability and Rural Politics before the Great Depression

The twenties saw a major expansion of the Australian wheat lands. Mainly through soldier settlement, large parts of the Mallee and Western Riverina were brought under cultivation for the first time, and the eastern frontier of the Western Australian wheat belt was pushed further into the hinterland. The result was an increase of more than 50 per cent in the area under wheat, which grew from 9,072,167 acres in 1920 to 14,976,564 acres in 1929.[1] The pressure of demand led to an inflation of land prices and production costs with the result that most of the new settlers (and many of the old) were forced to borrow heavily, but they did so in the expectation that a run of good seasons and prices would enable them to balance their accounts. These good seasons did not come. Only in 1924-5 was there a combination of bumper harvests and high international prices, and the late twenties saw the weight of debt in the wheat industry increase considerably. Not only were prices fluctuating and generally declining but severe droughts reduced considerably the size of the 1925-6 and 1927-8 crops. The table opposite sets out the position in terms of prices and production.

A Royal Commission on the wheat, flour, and bread industry reported in 1934 that the total indebtedness of wheatgrowers growing 100 acres of wheat or more amounted to £151,500,000 of which about £100,000,000 had been lent by private agencies and joint stock banks.[2] Dunsdorfs calculates that, although the depression years of the early thirties added their share, most of this sum was incurred during the twenties, when he estimates wheat farmers' debts rose from £20 million in 1920-1 to £100 million in 1928-9,[3] by which time perhaps one-fifth

[1] Edgars Dunsdorfs, *The Australian Wheat-Growing Industry 1788-1948*, p. 533. See S. M. Wadham and G. L. Wood, *Land Utilization in Australia*, pp. 160-1.

[2] 'Royal Commission on the Wheat, Flour and Bread Industries', Second Report, pp. 99-100, *C.P.P.*, 1933-34.

[3] Dunsdorfs, op. cit., p. 425. See also 'Report of the Royal Commission appointed to Enquire into The Disabilities affecting the Agricultural Industry of Western Australia', Pap. 22, *W.A.P.P.*, 1930-1, vol. III.

	Australian wheat Production ('000,000 bushels)	*Average wheat prices (f.o.r. principal Australian ports)*	*Average yield of wheat bushels per acre (calendar years)*
1920–21	145·9	8s. 6½d.	16·1
1921–22	129·1	5s. 5d.	13·3
1922–23	109·5	5s. 2½d.	1·2*
1923–24	125·0	4s. 9½d.	13·1
1924–25	164·6	6s. 6d.	15·2
1925–26	114·5	6s. 2¾d.	11·2
1926–27	160·8	5s. 3½d.	13·8
1927–28	118·2	5s. 4¾d.	9·6
1928–29	159·7	4s. 9½d.	10·8
1929–30	126·9	4s. 3½d.	8·5

* 11·2?

Sources: *Primary Industries, 1956-57, Part I, Rural Industries*, Bulletin No. 51, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Canberra, 1958, p. 29; 'Royal Commission on the Wheat, Flour and Bread Industries', First Report, Table XI, p. 27, *C.P.P.*, 1932-33-34; Dunsdorfs, *Australian Wheat-Growing Industry*, p. 535.

of the industry's annual income was being absorbed by interest payments. An inquiry conducted by the 1934 Royal Commission revealed that as early as 1928, out of a total of 44,303 wheat farmers with accounts in joint stock banks 18,955 had debit balances totalling £22,685,630.[4] Although indebtedness in itself is not necessarily a sign of instability in an industry, figures such as these indicate that by the end of the twenties wheat farmers' finances were in a serious state, and the badly organized credit apparatus upon which they relied to finance development was of little assistance to them. While several good public rural credit agencies had been established in the nineties and in the early years of the century, their extension had been neglected in the post-war period. Institutions such as the Rural Bank of New South Wales, the Agricultural Banks of Western Australia and Queensland, the State Savings Banks of Victoria and South Australia, the Industries Assistance Board of Western Australia, the Closer Settlement Commission of Victoria and the Rural Credits Department of the Commonwealth Bank were performing a useful function, but most of the credit for agricultural expansion in the twenties came from joint stock banks, mortgage companies, stock and station agencies or stores, whose interest rates and conditions of repayment were not always determined by considerations of public interest. Bankruptcies and foreclosures had become familiar events in agricultural settlements by the late twenties, although they were still not frequent enough to make men leave the land in large numbers.

Some regions were much more affected than others, the Victorian Mallee being in particularly bad straits. From 1,275,122 acres in 1915 its area under wheat had fallen to 919,321 acres in 1919 before rising

[4] 'Royal Commission on the Wheat, Flour and Bread Industries', Second Report, p. 101.

steadily, under the impact of soldier settlement, to 2,357,287 acres in 1930. Droughts hit the Mallee (which had an unreliable rainfall at the best of times) in 1922, 1925 and 1927, that of the last year being the worst, for in it yields fell to 0·2 bushels per acre in Millewa county, 2·8 in Tatchera, 4·0 in Karkarooc and 4·2 in Weeah, compared with a yield of 8·5 in Victoria as a whole.[5] Inefficient cultivation was the other danger; year after year of continuous cropping on farms which were too small and over-valued contributed to the deterioration of soil structure and fertility and by the early thirties there was more than a possibility that the Mallee might become a dustbowl.[6] Partly because clearing and consolidation costs were still relatively high in the region, and partly because so many of the farmers there had a large interest bill to meet each year, costs of production were exceptionally high. The 1934 Royal Commission found on the basis of a survey of 524 wheat farms throughout Australia that the average cost of production per bushel was 3s. 6d. for the total sample, that the median cost for the 143 Victorian farms was 3s. 8½d. and that the median costs in the Mallee were 4s. 0¾d. in the southern portion (54 cases) and 5s. 6⅜d. in the northern portion (18 cases). By contrast, the median cost in the Wimmera, where farming on the black soils had now reached a high point of efficiency, was only 3s. 1¼d.[7] The rate of indebtedness in the Mallee, therefore, must have been considerably in excess of that prevailing in the established regions.[8]

Indebtedness, drought and falling prices produced discontent throughout the wheat districts, discontent which was most acute in the Mallee, the western parts of the Riverina and the eastern limits of the Western Australian wheat belt. The demands it generated seriously embarrassed the Country Parties, particularly those which had joined coalition governments with Nationalists. To be successful, the coalition strategy depended on increasing prosperity or at least continued stability, times in which administrative concessions such as tariff cuts, bonuses, grants, tax reductions and more telephones would justify sectional support for a country party which had made its peace with

[5] E. and L. Dunsdorfs, *Historical Statistics of the Australian Wheatgrowing Industry, Acreage and Average Yield in Counties and Divisions, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, 1792-1950*, pp. 29-31, 41. On the history of Mallee farming in this period see an excellent series of articles, *Argus* (Melbourne), 12-15, 27, 28 Feb., 12, 13 June 1929.

[6] S. M. Wadham, 'The Boundaries of Arable Cultivation in Victoria', *Economic Record*, May 1930, pp. 1-27; A. R. Callaghan and A. J. Millington, *The Wheat Industry in Australia*, pp. 153-4; 'Royal Commission on the Wheat, Flour and Bread Industries', First Report, p. 17.

[7] Ibid., Second Report, pp. 57, 58, 70.

[8] See ibid., p. 108. See also *Argus*, 17 Oct. 1929, for a very good article dealing with the cumulative effects of falling prices, droughts and indebtedness in the Mallee settlements.

the conservative order. But a tamed country party was unable to identify itself with any rural demands which ran counter to the *laissez-faire* values of the National Party, and a number of such demands arose in the late twenties. Two of these formed the basis for powerful and interdependent protest movements, one for the compulsory marketing of primary produce, and the other for a downward revision of the tariff. In both cases the Federal Country Party tried to ignore and then to dampen the protest, but not with complete success. Its essentially conservative role in this situation needs to be stressed; despite its readiness to innovate in certain fields of government activity, its approach towards marketing and tariff policy was one of improvisation.

The choice between voluntary and compulsory marketing organizations was one which troubled most agrarian movements in the twenties. Conservative farmers preferred to deal either with private grain merchants or with co-operative selling companies organized on a voluntary basis, but radical farmers insisted that unless the State intervened to take over the distribution system connected with a particular industry and obliged all growers to sell their produce to a central pool, the powerful financial and business interests behind the proprietary wheat handling companies would always conspire to break the co-operatives and reduce the share of profits allocated to the producers. This issue disturbed the agrarian parties of Canada in particular. The Canadian federal government had formed a wheat board with compulsory powers in 1919 only to discontinue it in the following year. In the period of low grain prices which followed, farmers on the western prairies demanded the reinstitution of the board. Enabling legislation was passed in the Federal Parliament sanctioning the establishment of provincial wheat boards, but as nothing had been done to bring these into operation within a reasonable time the various Grain Growers' Associations decided to establish voluntary contract pools, that in Alberta being set up in 1923 and those in Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 1924.[9] Between the 1925-6 and 1929-30 seasons these pools handled over half the Canadian wheat crop. Nevertheless, the radicals of the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) began a campaign to institute a compulsory pool, on the grounds that this was the only means of weathering a sudden fall in grain prices. In 1928 it adopted a resolution in favour of a compulsory pool, but the proposal was rejected by the 1929 Wheat Pool Convention. Throughout Saskatchewan, the debate on this question divided farmers into conservative and radical camps.[10]

[9] Harold S. Patton, 'The Canadian Wheat Pool in Prosperity and Depression', *Commodity Control in the Pacific Area, A Symposium on Recent Experience*, ed. W. L. Holland, pp. 126-7.

[10] S. M. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan, A Study in Political Sociology*, pp. 76-7.

As we have seen, the decontrol of the wheat industry in Australia, carried out in 1921, had produced a demand from one section of the growers for a peace-time scheme of compulsory marketing. Subsequently, the edge had been taken off this demand by good seasons in 1923-4 and 1924-5 and by the suggestion that the various voluntary pools established in 1921 and 1922 should be given a chance to prove themselves. Unlike the Canadian pools, however, all the Australian organizations except that of Western Australia failed to fulfil their early promise. With the return of free market conditions in the 1921-2 season, the pre-war firms of John Darling and Co., Bell and Co., Dalgety and Co., and Louis Dreyfus and Co., worked steadily to re-establish their hold on the market and were able to do so, except in Western Australia.[11] In that State the pool was reasonably successful, partly because competition from the private firms was weakest there and partly because of the strength of Westralian Farmers Ltd, whose handling and warehousing system had proved effective. At the suggestion of the Farmers and Graziers' Co-operative, the New South Wales pool adopted a similar system in 1925 but this innovation came too late to save the scheme, which failed in the 1927-8 season and was not resumed until 1930-1. The Victorian and South Australian pools appeared to be facing a similar crisis, but in 1927 they took over the Canadian system whereby growers were required to sign contracts guaranteeing to send all their wheat to the pool for three years.[12] As the table opposite makes clear, however, the pools as a whole were not securely based in the late twenties.

Small farmers and new settlers encountered great difficulty in persuading the established agricultural pressure groups and the country parties to endorse their demand for compulsory pooling. In New South Wales, the Country Party (as the Progressive Party was renamed in 1925) and the F.S.A. were so conservative that many farmers transferred their support to the Labor Party. Motions in favour of a compulsory pool had been defeated at both the 1923 and 1924 conferences of the F.S.A.,[13] but in 1925 the Association sent a deputation to the Labor government requesting that it establish a compulsory pool under growers' control. This the government refused to do, but it offered to form a compulsory pool which would be state-controlled and yet would provide growers with adequate representation in its management.[14] In 1926, after a heated debate, the F.S.A. conference turned

[11] F. R. Beasley, *Open Market Versus Pooling in Australia*, pp. 45-8; G. L. Wood, 'Wheat Pools, With Special Reference to Australia', *Economic Record*, Supplement, Feb. 1928, p. 35; Dunsdorfs, *Australian Wheat-Growing Industry*, pp. 231-2; W. Millar Smith, *The Marketing of Australian and New Zealand Primary Products*, p. 245.

[12] Ibid., p. 242. Although Smith gives 1928 as the starting date for the Victorian pool it was actually 1927 (see *Argus*, 29 Apr. 1927).

[13] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Reports*, 1923, pp. 59-61; 1924, pp. 51-9.

[14] Ibid., 1925, p. 52; *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 102, 22 Sept. 1925, p. 906.

Percentage of the Total Wheat Crop handled by the Voluntary Co-operative Pools in each State

	N.S.W.	*Vic.*	*S.A.*	*W.A.*
1921–22	58	78	36	96 (compulsory pool)
1922–23	48	66	44	81
1923–24	33	60	33	40
1924–25	25	34	12·5	45
1925–26	4·6*	14	21	35
1926–27	25	50†	30	65
1927–28	5	12	25	53
1928–29	no pool	28	44	58
1929–30	no pool	55	36	46

* Including wheat handled under the pool's warehouse scheme. † Approximate.

Source: W. Millar Smith, *The Marketing of Australian and New Zealand Primary Products*, p. 245. (The 1925–6 percentages for the eastern States are from Edgars Dunsdorfs, *The Australian Wheat-Growing Industry, 1788-1948*, p. 232.

down a motion for a compulsory pool, and declared instead for a more effective voluntary pool.[15] In doing so, the delegates were following the lead given by A. K. Trethowan, the F.S.A.'s vice-president, and E. A. Buttenshaw, leader of the parliamentary Country Party. As managing director of the Farmers and Graziers' Co-operative Ltd, which was the sole handling agent for the voluntary pool, Trethowan was anxious to preserve the *status quo* and Buttenshaw, who hoped to arrange a close electoral alliance with the National Party, did not want to adopt a principle which he knew his prospective allies would oppose. The initiative now passed to the Labor government, which organized a producers' conference at Bathurst in September 1926 to discuss marketing and allied problems. A Wheat Committee appointed by this conference suggested to the government that growers' opinions on the compulsory pool proposal should be tested by ballot,[16] and immediate arrangements were made to hold one in the new year. When the poll took place on 28 February 1927, only two-fifths of those entitled to vote did so and only 45 per cent of the valid votes cast were in favour of a compulsory pool,[17] the F.S.A. Executive having advised all its members to vote 'No'.[18]

[15] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1926, pp. 67-76.

[16] *S.M.H.*, 24 Sept. 1926.

[17] The official figures for the ballot were:

Number of growers to whom ballot papers issued	18,626
Number of ballot papers returned	7,825
Number against establishment of compulsory pool	4,334
Number in favour of compulsory pool	3,437
Informal	54

(Source: *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 111, 3 Mar. 1927, p. 1848.)

[18] *S.M.H.*, 25 Jan., 8 Feb. 1927. See also *Producers' Review* (Toowoomba), April 1927, p. 11.

Despite the vote, the Lang government went ahead with its plans for marketing reform, and put through Parliament a Primary Produce Marketing Bill based on similar Queensland legislation. It proposed that growers should be able to vote by a three-fifths majority to establish a state-controlled compulsory pool for their particular product, to appoint representatives to the controlling board, and to dissolve the pool, again by ballot, should the need arise. A State Marketing Bureau and a Director of Marketing were appointed to administer the scheme generally.[19] When the leader of the National Party, T. R. Bavin, announced his opposition to the principle of compulsory pooling,[20] Buttenshaw readily concurred, describing the measure as 'nothing more nor less than the socialisation of industry'.

> those of us who believe in co-operative effort cannot under any circumstances favour compulsion. It is an unwarrantable interference with the rights and privileges of growers who are endeavouring to make a living from the land.

He later made the significant complaint that the small grower was unduly favoured by the measure's voting provisions:

> I do not want to see a man who has little interest in the matter—a small producer—being given the power to outvote those with big interests. I do not want to see a man with 300 acres of wheat or 500 sheep empowered to outvote the man with 3,000 acres of wheat or 100,000 sheep, especially as those men in the bigger way are to have certain conditions forced upon them.[21]

The F.S.A. Executive denounced the measure and the Association's 1927 conference again rejected the compulsory pooling proposal and recommended further reforms of the voluntary pool system.[22]

Having won the election of 8 October 1927, the National and Country Parties formed a coalition government which remained in power until 1930. However, the Country Party recognized the extent to which the Labor Party's endorsement of the compulsory pool idea had improved its standing amongst small farmers, and its Minister for Agriculture, V. C. Thorby, went to the length of admitting the need for organized marketing to 'stimulate production and eliminate to a great extent the speculative element which now attends the process of distribution'.[23] The F.S.A. had also undergone a change of heart, and its 1928 conference at last declared in favour of a compul-

[19] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 109, 28 Jan. 1927, pp. 742 ff.

[20] Ibid., vol. 110, 10 Feb. 1927, p. 1109.

[21] Ibid., pp. 1128, 1136.

[22] *S.M.H.*, 8 Feb. 1927; N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1927, pp. 66-8.

[23] 'A Summary of the Provisions of the Marketing of Primary Products Act, 1927, As Amended by the Marketing of Primary Products (Amendment) Act, 1928', Sydney, 1928, p. 3.

sory pool.[24] Polls of wheatgrowers on the question of a compulsory pool were held under the provisions of the Marketing of Primary Products Act in both September 1928 and September 1929. Although the proportion of voters favouring compulsion rose from 44·69 per cent in the first poll to 60·526 per cent on the second,[25] the necessary two-thirds majority was attained on neither occasion. The highest votes for compulsion were registered in the Riverina, where dependence on the wheat industry was greatest. In both campaigns the F.S.A. came out strongly for a 'Yes' vote but the Country Party remained aloof and ignored demands for legislation to make a simple majority sufficient to have a pool established.[26]

In Victoria, the compulsory pool agitation was equally unsuccessful, and it had the effect of accentuating the differences between the radical and conservative sections of the farming community. Although the March 1925 conference of the V.F.U. had declared both for a compulsory pool and for a growers' ballot on whether one was desirable,[27] the Allan-Peacock coalition persistently refused to entertain such suggestions. Again it was a Labor government, the Hogan Ministry of 1927-8, which arranged for a growers' ballot to be held, the poll taking place in May 1928. The compulsory principle was supported by the Country Progressive Party, the radical group which had broken away from the parent Country Party in 1926, but was opposed by the Country Party until March, when its annual conference decided to back the proposal.[28] In the campaign which preceded the poll, the opponents of the compulsory pool actively canvassed support, sending out how-to-vote forms and circulars outlining their views;[29] not only the private grain trading firms but also several large stock and station agencies came out against the scheme. In the event, the proposal was narrowly defeated (52 per cent against), mainly because of the heavy 'No' majorities in the Goulburn Valley and the Wimmera; but in the Mallee, where agrarian radicalism had received a new lease of life, the votes in favour of the pool were high, reaching 81·7 per cent in Millewa county.[30] In 1929 the Country Progressive Party suggested to the McPherson Nationalist government that a Marketing Act along the lines of those in force in Queensland and New South Wales should

[24] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1928, pp. 70-3.

[25] *S.M.H.*, 16, 19 Sept. 1929.

[26] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Reports*, 1928, p. 74; 1929, p. 54.

[27] *Argus*, 14 Mar. 1925.

[28] As late as February, however, the compulsory pool idea had been opposed by the Victorian Country Party President, E. Reseigh (see Melbourne *Herald*, 9 Feb. 1928).

[29] See, e.g., 'The Proposed Compulsory Wheat Pool. As Others See It', [Melbourne, 1928]. A copy of this leaflet may be found in the Goldsbrough Mort papers, A.N.U. Archives, ref. 2/145/472.

[30] *Argus*, 25 May 1928.

be adopted, but although a cabinet sub-committee recommended such a measure,[31] the government was defeated before anything could be done.

The Federal Country Party was equally reluctant to sponsor a compulsory wheat pool. Although the Rural Credits Department of the Commonwealth Bank, established in 1925 at Page's instigation, gave generous grants to the various voluntary co-operative pools, Page and his colleagues pleaded section 92 of the Constitution, guaranteeing freedom of interstate trade, as an excuse for not tackling the problem of constructing a system of state compulsory pools co-ordinated by a federal authority. This was the proposal embodied in the Scullin Labor government's unsuccessful Wheat Marketing Bill of 1930[32] and the 1934 Royal Commission recommended a similar scheme.[33] In March 1929, when a Labor member had moved in the House of Representatives that the government be asked to organize a federal wheat marketing scheme, Percy Stewart had endorsed his suggestions enthusiastically, but none of the Country Party members had supported him.[34] It could be argued that on such occasions the Federal Country Party was forced by its obligations within the coalition agreement to remain silent, but this only adds to the point that the coalition strategy had seriously impaired the party's ability to come to terms with the radical demands which had been its stock-in-trade in the immediate post-war years.

Compulsory marketing also appealed to an influential section of the dairy industry, although the need for control was not as pressing there as it was in the wheat industry. Thomas Paterson, the Country Party member for Gippsland and Minister for Markets and Migration after 18 June 1926, had fostered a voluntary scheme for butter marketing based on the principle that a levy on production should be used to subsidize the industry's export surplus. It was first brought into operation in January 1926 under the control of the Australian Butter Stabilization Committee, which fixed the initial levy at $1\frac{1}{2}$d. per lb, and the export bounty at 3d. per lb. A tariff on New Zealand butter imports, imposed on 30 June 1928, enabled the Committee to raise the levy to $1\frac{3}{4}$d. per lb and the export bounty to $4\frac{1}{2}$d. per lb as from 1 January 1929.[35] However, because the Paterson Scheme remained voluntary, some proprietary dairy factories were able to remain outside the organization and sell their butter at a large profit on the local market, and requests were made for the formation of a Central

[31] Ibid., 10 Oct. 1929.

[32] Geoffrey Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1929-1949*, pp. 17-18.

[33] 'Royal Commission on the Wheat, Flour and Bread Industries', Second Report, pp. 254-6.

[34] *C.P.D.*, vol. 120, 18 Mar. 1929, pp. 1366-7.

[35] *Argus*, 22 Dec. 1925; 31 Oct. 1928.

Board 'to effectively and efficiently control the marketing of butter'.[36] A step in this direction was the formation in 1929 of a Dairy Produce Inter-State Committee, with subsidiary State committees, to regulate the price of butter sold in Australia,[37] but this was still a far cry from compulsory marketing.

Where the demand for compulsory butter marketing was made, as in New South Wales, the Country Party would align itself with the forces in opposition. In October 1928, a ballot was taken to test New South Wales dairy farmers' attitudes towards a proposal to form a compulsory pool under the terms of the State Marketing Act. W. T. Missingham, the Country Party member for Lismore, worked with Norco Ltd, the most powerful co-operative dairy-manufacturing company on the North Coast, to persuade producers to vote 'No', while the advocacy of a 'Yes' vote was left to the Primary Producers' Union and the smaller co-operative factories in the Central West, South Coast and Manning regions.[38] At the poll, 59·6 per cent of the dairy farmers who voted declared for a compulsory pool, despite the fact that the 'Yes' votes in Byron and Lismore (districts dominated by Norco) were only 24·1 and 30·2 per cent respectively.[39] Had Missingham and the other Country Party members from dairying electorates backed the 'Yes' campaign, the two-thirds majority required to authorize the pool might well have been obtained.

The Country Parties' resistance to the agitation for compulsory pooling was matched by their reluctance to further demands for a reversal of the federal government's policy of tariff protection. Before his death on 7 May 1928, H. E. Pratten, the Minister for Trade and Customs, carried through two upward revisions of the tariff (No. 26 of 1926, and No. 2 of 1928) and enabled his successor, H. S. Gullett, to declare in December 1928 that the Bruce-Page government 'in its work during the last three years has done more for protection than has any Ministry since Federation in the same period'.[40] Although the industries concerned welcomed the tariffs against butter, cheese and maize imports imposed by the 1928 Schedule, the primary industries as a whole were anxious for a return to a revenue tariff régime. Pressure groups such as the New South Wales F.S.A. and the V.F.U., both of which included dairy and fruit farmers amongst their members and which in the past had occupied neutral ground in tariff politics, now committed themselves definitely in favour of a reduction of the

[36] See 'Report of Royal Commission on the Dairying Industry', Pap. 34, p. 11, *V.P.P.*, 1928, vol. II.

[37] Millar Smith, *Marketing of Australian and New Zealand Primary Products*, pp. 115-17.

[38] See *S.M.H.*, 23 July, 9, 16 Aug., 25 Sept. 1928.

[39] Ibid., 9 Oct. 1928.

[40] *Argus*, 22 Dec. 1928.

existing duties.[41] Their stand greatly strengthened the position of the Western Australian P.P.A., the South Australian C.P.A. and the New South Wales Graziers' Association which had always adopted a revenue tariffist point of view.

Had the members of the Federal Country Party reacted in accordance with the shifts in policy of their supporting organizations, the party would have demanded a cessation of tariff increases either in 1926 or in 1927, but it refused to take any action. At a party meeting in February 1926, a motion for a reduction of duties affecting the prosperity of farming was shelved and replaced by one which advocated an inquiry into the economic effects of the tariff.[42] In mid-1927, a conference of the Australian Country Party Association refused to accept a Western Australian motion for a reduction of duties but adopted a compromise resolution to the effect that Australian primary industries should be protected on the same basis as secondary industries—Page's doctrine of 'all-round protection'.[43] An extraordinary conference of the Victorian Country Party in July 1928 adopted a special committee's recommendation that customs duties be reduced, and referred the proposal to the federal party for 'keen consideration'.[44] However, the federal members declared themselves in favour of either a reconstruction of the Tariff Board or the appointment of a special committee to investigate the efficiency of the protectionist policy as an aid to development; and they again passed a resolution advocating the latter proposal early in 1929.[45]

Page took the line that the Country Party ministers were committed to abide by government policy. In 1926 he had said:

> A Minister may personally hold certain views, but in Cabinet he has to abide by the decision of the majority and fight for whatever policy is put before the country by Cabinet as a corporate body.
> . . . At present my duty as a Minister is to stand solidly behind the [Pratten] Schedule which the Government has submitted to the House, and to fight continuously for it.[46]

The Western Australian members of the party, Harry Gregory and J. H. Prowse, however, felt that the fact of the Country Party's being

[41] See N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Reports*, 1926, pp. 18, 45-6; 1927, p. 42; 1928, pp. 36-40; 1929, pp. 31-2 and 100-1. For the V.F.U.'s representations see *Argus*, 12 Mar. 1926, 16 Mar. 1928, 25 Feb., 21 Mar. 1929.

[42] Ibid., 12 Feb. 1926. For the text of the latter resolution see U. R. Ellis, *History of the Australian Country Party*, p. 119.

[43] *Minute Book of the Australian Country Party Association*, 1926-43, 1 June 1927.

[44] *V.F.U. Conference Minutes*, 1928, pp. 127-44; *V.F.U. Annual Report*, 1929, p. 6.

[45] See *Argus*, 1, 15, 20 Sept. 1928; 15 Mar. 1929.

[46] *C.P.D.*, vol. 112, 18 Mar. 1926, p. 1747. Cf. his remarks at the 1928 conference of the Western Australian P.P.A. (P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1928, p. 61).

associated with the cabinet meant that it should press the case for tariff reductions with greater zeal.

> When people get into Cabinet they are apt to say, 'You don't know what we did in Cabinet; you don't know the fight we put up'. I only know when the duties go up.
> . . . I say our leader should work gradually to reduce the Tariff, and in any case should prevent its increase.[47]

This was a point which the rank and file of the country party organizations appreciated, even though cabinet convention justified the stand taken by Page.

The need for the existing level of protection in Australia was questioned in 1929 by a British Economic Commission and by a team of Australian economists which had been appointed in 1927.[48] Their arguments were taken seriously by the Prime Minister, who in September told the annual dinner of the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures that the system of protective tariffs had practically reached its limits, and could not be pushed much further without damaging the country's economic structure.[49] There can be no doubt that the Bruce-Page government was on the point of revising its tariff policy but it was defeated at the snap election of 12 October 1929, and a Labor administration was left with the legacy of the Pratten Tariffs. Once more in opposition, the Country Party returned to the revenue tariffist and free trade slogans of its youth. The fact remains, however, that throughout the late twenties it had deliberately frustrated the attempts of its supporting organizations to emphasize the need for a return to the principles of revenue tariffism.

It should be noted that the issues of compulsory marketing and revenue tariffism were those which had given the Country Parties much of their force during their electoral breakthrough and had won them support during their independent period between 1920 and 1922. With the adoption of the coalition strategy, the Federal Country Party and the major State country parties had found themselves no longer in a position to represent these demands in the face of Nationalist hostility, and as substitutes they had offered administrative concessions. The economic instability of the late twenties, however, had not only revived the marketing and tariff issues but had raised doubts within the country party movement about the ultimate wisdom of the coalition strategy. The political counterpart of the agitation for compulsory pooling and tariff revision was country party revivalism, a demand that the Country Parties return to the basic principles of complete electoral and parliamentary independence, giving conditional support to whichever of the major parties, National or Labor, was

[47] Ibid., 1927, p. 42. See also *Primary Producer*, 27 Jan. 1927.

[48] 'Report of the British Economic Commission', *C.P.P.*, 1929, vol. II, pp. 1231-72; *The Australian Tariff, An Economic Enquiry*, 1929.

[49] *Argus*, 3 Sept. 1929.

more prepared to help rural interests. The romantic basis of this change was most significant; the revivalists held that the early country parties had been 'neither anti-Labor nor anti-Liberal', that they had supported 'measures before men', that they had been exclusively farmers' organizations containing no townsmen, and that their institutions had been organized on democratic rather than oligarchic lines. In addition, the early farmers' associations were said to have ruled their parliamentary parties with an iron rod.

The extent and the appeal of this revivalist movement alarmed the established leadership, especially because they realized that it was linked with powerful economic demands. The response of the conservative leaders was threefold: firstly, they tried to weaken further the formal relationship between the parliamentary groups and their electoral organizations; secondly, they ensured that the connection with the National Party was respected and strengthened; thirdly, they insisted that the crucial decisions of policy and strategy had to be taken by the leadership rather than by delegated representatives at all levels in the organization, although the rank and file would later have their chance to endorse them. As Page had said in 1924:

> The function of an organisation is to frame a platform and to incorporate in it its ideals. The function of a leader is to translate those ideals into practice and, when an opportunity comes, to test the electorate by putting forward out of the platform that policy which is immediately applicable to the times and fulfils present needs. The organisation then functions with the leader in returning its candidates to the Parliament of the Nation to translate into actual legislative fact the election policy.[50]

He later told the V.F.U.:

> He was quite willing that the majority should rule. If their leader did not satisfy them, there was only one thing to do—supersede him. That was the proper way. Either follow your leader or put him out. A leader must give a lead. Leadership was the thing that counted. A leader should not be expected to run to the rank and file for every little thing.[51]

While country people may accept such an idea in those crises which dictate uncritical reliance on a strong man, if they once consider that they have been taken for granted they are likely to insist that the rights and conventions of their 'organization' be asserted. Once the country parties had achieved an electoral breakthrough, most of their supporting organizations declined in membership and influence, and the power of the new leaders, men such as Page, Bruxner, Monger and Allan, increased considerably. Despite occasional flashes of discontent, they and the conservative oligarchies to which they belonged

[50] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1924, p. 94.

[51] *Countryman* (Melb.), 3 Oct. 1924.

began to exercise a wide measure of authority in the formulation of policy and strategy. But the uncertainty of the late twenties revived rank-and-file interest in the neglected functions of their associations just as it induced them to call for a revival of past strategies and past policies, and to look back nostalgically to the 'good old days'. In Victoria, the movement split into two, while in New South Wales and Western Australia the conservative leaderships were shaken, and even Page and his federal colleagues were forced to take fresh stock of the organizational pressures bearing upon them. In an interview with the writer, Page recalled a V.F.U. conference at which the Mallee radicals were making an impression with their speeches. He drew John Allan's attention to them ('very extreme fellows out in the Wimmera') and was told that there was no need to worry—that although they made a lot of noise they would not have the numbers when votes were taken.[52] But what they lacked in numbers they certainly made up in enthusiasm.

Victoria: Revivalism and Discord in the V.F.U., 1925-1927

The year 1925 was a tumultuous one for the Victorian Country Party. Its leader, John Allan, was Premier of a coalition cabinet in which Country Party ministers held the main portfolios affecting primary production. However, unlike Page, he was unable to convince his followers that coalitions were worth the sacrifice of independence by the parliamentary party. When the V.F.U.'s annual conference was held in March, Dunstan and Stewart claimed that the alliance with the Nationalists would cost the Country Party its separate identity, its mass following, and its electoral status. They asserted that the party would obtain better results by standing alone—'By maintaining the balance of power the party would be able to extract better conditions from whichever party was in power.' Allan and his supporters, on the other hand, said that such suggestions reflected an 'immoral political attitude' and ignored the fact that the Federal and State coalition governments had greatly helped rural interests, a fact which made them worth continuing even if electoral pacts were required to bridge the gap between one coalition government and another. In the end the principle of the Country Party's joining coalitions was approved by the close result of 165 votes to 155, indicating that the radical wing of the party had greatly increased its influence amongst the hitherto inert centre group. Those voting in the minority on this occasion subsequently attended a special meeting, convened by Stewart, at which they agreed to honour the Federal and State coalition arrangements for the lives of the current parliaments but at the same time affirmed their adherence 'to the principle of the independence of the Victorian Farmers' Union and the Country party'. In particular, they objected to electoral pacts and to advice being given V.F.U. supporters about the

[52] Interview, Canberra, 22 Feb. 1956.

allocation of preference votes. Later, the open session of the conference showed its spirit by adopting resolutions in favour of a compulsory wheat pool and of a growers' ballot on the question.[53]

Allan, aware that the National Party would never accept such proposals, had to play for time. He pleaded the legal difficulties involved in forming a compulsory pool, and claimed that the Legislative Council's opposition to the idea could bring down the ministry. 'If the farmers desired to see the present Cabinet remain in office', he pointed out, 'they should not be too persistent at the present juncture in pressing for the pool.'[54] When Stewart and Dunstan refused to let the matter drop, he declared that he 'would not be told by the Radical party what he was to do'.[55] A special meeting of the V.F.U. Central Council on 16 June rejected by 14 votes to 5 a number of radical resolutions seeking to censure the government for its failure either to institute a compulsory pool or to hold a growers' ballot, and approved Allan's proposal to provide a financial guarantee for the voluntary pool being run by the Victorian Wheat-Growers' Corporation Ltd.[56] But although the radicals were weak at the executive level, they were gaining support amongst the Union's branches, and their position was improved when one of the Country Party's ministers, W. P. Crockett, M.L.C., resigned on the grounds that Allan had not only refused a growers' ballot on the wheat pool issue to please the Nationalists but had also refused to recommend to cabinet a reduction of freight charges on dried fruit carried from the Mildura district.[57] However, at a further Central Council meeting on 16 September, the radicals were again defeated on several divisions (this time by 10 votes to 5) and Allan, whose confidence was now at its height, defended his aherence to the coalition strategy, expressed regret for the compromise made at the conference of March 1924, and claimed that the 'extremists' were making the government's task difficult. At this, the radical members left the meeting and refused to resume their places on the following day.[58]

What had begun as a vague difference of opinion, or even of temperament, at the conference of March 1925 had now hardened into a faction fight, and in the months preceding the next conference, held

[53] *Argus*, 11-14 Mar. 1925; *Countryman* (Melb.), 13, 20 Mar. 1925.

[54] *Argus*, 4 May 1925.

[55] Ibid., 13 June 1925.

[56] *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 3, 16 June 1925, pp. 63-5. The Council at this time consisted of ten district representatives, four parliamentary delegates (two State and two federal), and five office-bearers (two of whom were also parliamentarians). The five radicals were Isaac Hart (Bendigo District), Harold Glowrey (Wimmera District), Percy Stewart, Albert Dunstan and W. J. McCann.

[57] *Argus*, 30 June, 6 July 1925; *V.P.D.*, vol. 169, 11 Aug. 1925, pp. 329-35.

[58] *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 3, 16 Sept. 1925, pp. 73-4; *Countryman* (Melb.), 18 Sept. 1925; *Argus*, 17 Sept. 1925.

in March 1926, the lines were firmly drawn. The radicals circulated a report[59] in which they argued that the Federal and State Country Parties should withdraw from their respective coalition ministries because these had failed to take important measures in the rural interest, measures such as reducing the tariff, forming a rural bank, and establishing a compulsory wheat pool; they maintained that the Country Parties had, by not upholding the V.F.U.'s independent principles, alienated radical support, thereby causing a decline in membership (which dropped between 1920 and 1925 from 14,817 to 5,798, while the number of branches fell from 547 to 258)[60] and obliging the Central Council to use money from the fighting fund for general expenditure. Allan and W. G. Pickering, president of the V.F.U., replied that coalition ministries were the best means of influencing policy, that they were a necessary alternative to Labor rule in a three-party system, and that it was general apathy and the high membership fee (£1) which had produced the decline in membership. Moreover, they disputed the radicals' allegations about the financial position of the Union.[61]

When the conference met at Ballarat for its first session, Pickering accused the radicals of causing trouble and told them that they should leave the movement if they could not abide by the will of the majority.[62] This set the tone for the rest of the proceedings, and the radical faction found itself defeated in division after division amidst scenes of mounting confusion. A motion to prevent the Country Party from joining future coalitions was rejected, and Pickering defeated a left-wing candidate in the election for the presidency; the proportion of the votes polled by the radicals in these and other divisions varying between 38 and 46 per cent.[63] On the second day of the conference, Stewart and Dunstan proposed to a meeting of the radical delegates that they should secede from the movement, but Harold Hanslow and a few others persuaded them to continue the fight from within. Further defeats, however, destroyed the possibility of a *rapprochement* and a further meeting on the following day, attended by 147 men, decided that those present should leave the Union and form an organization of their own. A sum of £20 was

[59] 'Victorian Farmers' Union, 11th Conference held at Ballarat, March 9, 10 & 11, 1926. Report submitted by a Minority of the Central Council', Melbourne, [1926]. See also *Argus*, 19 Feb. 1926.

[60] *V.F.U. Annual Report*, 1920, p. 1; *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 3, 16 Sept. 1925, pp. 88-9.

[61] *Argus*, 10, 11 Mar. 1926.

[62] For the conference proceedings see ibid., 10-12 Mar. 1926; *Countryman* (Melb.), 12 Mar. 1926.

[63] *V.F.U. Conference Minutes*, 1926, pp. 13-14, 20, 21, 34. In an interview with the writer (Melbourne, 20 Aug. 1956), Mr Harold Hanslow suggested that the conservatives had at their disposal a large number of proxy votes.

collected for preliminary expenses, and a provisional committee was appointed, one of its first duties being to send a circular to branches asking whether or not they wanted to secede from the V.F.U.[64]

The secession movement rapidly gathered momentum, despite the efforts of Allan, Pickering, Page and others to bring it under control. It had little effect in Gippsland, but swept away many branches in the Mallee and Bendigo regions, and made an impression on the Wimmera, Northern and North-eastern Districts. Dunstan and Crockett left the State Country Party, and Stewart the federal party. Enthusiastic meetings of secessionists held at Bendigo and Ouyen in April drafted a constitution for a Primary Producers' Union (P.P.U.), and converted the informal committee formed at Ballarat into a provisional State Council.[65] P.P.U. branches were subsequently organized throughout the wheat belt, at a few places in the Goulburn Valley (Wyuna, Kyabram) and South Gippsland (Warragul, Koo-wee-rup). There were 103 branches in the Union by the time of its first conference, held in September. This was an emotional occasion, with Stewart, Dunstan, and the provisional president, H. J. Wiltshire,[66] romanticizing the early days of the V.F.U., which they portrayed as having been an independent, politically neutral party, pursuing the conditional-support strategy. Plans were already afoot for candidates of their proposed Country Progressive Party to contest all the electorates on the northern wheat belt. The conference adopted a constitution which clearly showed the hand of its secretary, J. J. Hall, who had also helped to frame the first constitution of the V.F.U. in 1916, but who now, with ten years of experience behind him, wanted to strengthen the authority of the organization in its dealings with the parliamentary party. The following clauses were in effect a statement of the main principles involved in the conditional-support strategy.

> 3 b. Definition of Independence—The Country Progressive Party shall enter into no coalition or pact with any other political party, but its parliamentary representatives shall support in Parliament any measures from any Administration that are in conformity with its programme and policy.
>
> 3 c. [This definition shall not] be altered except by the Conference of the Party, and such decision before coming into effect shall be ratified by a clear three-fourths majority vote of the financial members of the Party to whom the amending resolution or resolutions of alteration shall be submitted by postal ballot.

The Constitution provided for a structure closely resembling that of the V.F.U., with a hierarchy of branches and district councils focused on the annual conference of delegates and the State Council. Parliamentarians were excluded from the latter Council, which was empowered

[64] *Argus*, 11-12 Mar., 3 Apr. 1926; interview with Mr Hanslow, 20 Aug. 1956.

[65] *Argus*, 17, 24 Apr. 1926. [66] See ibid., 18, 20, 21 Sept. 1926.

to expel members who acted contrary to the 'independent principles' of the party.[67] The conference also decided to admit country townsmen to membership of the P.P.U., and elected McCann as the organization's first president.

Why had the Victorian Country Party divided in this way, and how final had the split become by the end of 1926? The cleavage which had appeared in March 1926 should not be dismissed as the result of personal rivalries between Page and Stewart, or between Allan and Dunstan. These were important, but much more fundamental issues were involved. The P.P.U. was essentially a product of the Mallee, where the difficulties of the new settlers were already driving them to make radical demands for a compulsory wheat pool, a rural bank, the bulk-handling system of carrying wheat, relief from the mortgage system—things which were not nearly so important in the more established regions to the south and east. In May 1928, for example, a ballot on the proposal to form a compulsory wheat pool produced solid 'yes' majorities in the Mallee counties and negative votes in the Wimmera and Northern counties.[68] Under Allan, the Country Party had become identified with the conservative farming districts and, when the split occurred, the radicals had turned to the P.P.U. as a means of harrying the government from without. In another respect, the cleavage marked the redefinition of the basic doctrinal and strategic conflict within the movement: just as Dunstan and Stewart were calling for a return to an older, more romantic tradition of independence, conditional support and political heroics, Allan and Page stood for the new realism symbolized by coalition governments and electoral pacts. One of Allan's right-hand men, Isaac Weaver, put the realist view in these terms:

> Mr. Allan and other members of the Country party found it impossible to continue an independant [*sic*] and separate political existence, and it had been found necessary to unite with the Nationalists. Measures not men was alright in theory, but in practice the Labour party could only be kept out of power by combining with the Nationalists.[69]

Yet, despite these differences, the split could have been avoided. Allan and Pickering had been extraordinarily inflexible in their dealings with the radicals, both at the important 1925 meetings of the V.F.U. Central Council and at the conference of March 1926. Had they given some ground, particularly on the economic issues, they would probably have held the loyalty of the moderate delegates. As it was, however, many delegates were driven to join the P.P.U. movement as the only means of furthering the flagging campaign for a

[67] *Country Progressive Party, Constitution and Rules, Political Platform & Policy*, Ouyen, 1927.

[68] *Argus*, 25 May 1928.

[69] Ibid., 1 Apr. 1927.

compulsory wheat pool and a rural bank, with the result that the new organization built up a surprising level of strength in a short time. Once they had formed their party, the radical leaders had two courses open to them; either they could pursue the civil war wholeheartedly and try displacing the V.F.U. from the Wimmera and Northern Districts, or they could work towards an ultimate reconciliation—on their own terms. They chose the latter course, and sought to demonstrate to the V.F.U.'s branches that the conditional-support strategy and radical economic policies were appropriate for a country party in the Victorian situation. Allan and his small coterie, who continued to take a rigidly conservative line, soon found that the V.F.U. was beginning to move steadily towards the radical position. In July 1926 its Central Council refused to accept an electoral alliance with the State National Party and its conference of March 1927 adopted an independent position.[70]

Early in 1927, there was a possibility that the breach might be healed, but before any definite steps could be taken the campaign for the State election of 9 April 1927 had begun. This was a confused occasion for two reasons; firstly, because the electoral redistribution of 1926 had considerably altered constituency boundaries while changing the ratio of city to country seats from 21:44 to 26:39, and, secondly, because the government parties did not present a united front to the electors. According to established convention, Allan, as Premier, should have delivered the main policy speech on behalf of the cabinet and both the National and Country Parties, while Sir Alexander Peacock would have made a secondary speech as Deputy Premier and as leader of the National Party. In other words, the two parties would have gone to the country as if, for constitutional purposes, they were a single party asking for a further mandate from the electors. However, the National Party appointed a private member, H. S. W. Lawson, as its election leader,[71] and he conducted its campaign as if the Nationalists were an independent group bearing no responsibility for the administration of the Allan-Peacock Ministry over the previous two years. In the major policy statement which he made on behalf of his party, he declared that stable government would be obtained only if the Nationalists were returned to the new Assembly with an absolute majority of the seats.

> The principal issue of the election was the restoration of Parliamentary government according to British traditions. As Mr. Deakin had said in regard to Federal politics, it is impossible to 'play the game' with three elevens in the field. If a complexity of units were sent into Parliament the result must be a destruction of the utility of the Parliamentary machine. Parliament had to function. . . . In

[70] *V.F.U. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 3, 15 July 1926, pp. 128-9; *Argus*, 17-19 Mar. 1927.

[71] Ibid., 3 Feb. 1927.

> the last Parliament a coalition had been the only way in which the work could be carried out. That was entirely the fault of the people. The only way to improve the position was for the people, at the coming election, to reinforce the Nationalist section of the House, and to make that party strong enough to take charge of affairs.[72]

Although six parties were engaged in this election, they fought the campaign as two blocs. On the right was the alignment of the National, Country, Progressive National and Australian Liberal Parties (the two latter being eccentric versions of the main National Party), whose candidates were generally careful to advise a mutual exchange of preference votes. Only the Country Party's nominees were reluctant to do so, but in any case an informal arrangement ensured that they were seldom opposed by Nationalist candidates. Lawson's call for a National Party majority alone affected the unity of the government parties. On the left, the Labor and Country Progressive Parties had established a limited alliance. The Australian Railways Union, for example, sent circulars to its members in the Lowan electorate advising them not to support the sitting Country Party member, M. E. Wettenhall, and thus by implication to vote for the latter's only opponent, a Country Progressive nominee.[73] In the Ouyen poll, more than two-thirds of a rejected Labor man's preferences went to a Country Progressive candidate, enabling him to defeat his Country Party rival. When a Country Progressive candidate was eliminated in the Gippsland West count, 48·6 per cent of his preferences went to Labor and only 18·1 per cent to the Country Party.

The election result showed a decisive shift to the left on the part of the electorate. The conservative group in the new Assembly consisted of 15 Nationalists, one Independent Nationalist, one Progressive Nationalist, and 10 Country Party members, making a total of 27, six short of a majority; on the other hand, the Labor Party had increased its numbers from 27 to 28 members, which meant that the balance of power was held by four Country Progressives, two Australian Liberals and four Independents. Allan did not resign his commission immediately, for he and Peacock were busily occupied with the visit to Victoria of the Duke and Duchess of York, but when the hard bargaining began, the Nationalists made it clear that their patience with the coalition order was at an end. As a substitute for the existing ministry, they suggested that the Country Party should support a minority National Party government headed by McPherson, but the Country Party showed no enthusiasm for the proposal and Allan finally re-

[72] Ibid., 26 Mar. 1927.

[73] Letter from M. E. Wettenhall to Mr Liddle, Melbourne, 27 Aug. 1927. Wettenhall Papers. Wettenhall protested that a circular (enclosed with his letter) had been distributed by the A.R.U. to 'all railway employees' in Lowan the day before the poll advising them to 'Place Wettenhall Last' on the ballot paper.

signed. The Governor, having interviewed both Albert Dunstan and E. J. Hogan, leaders of the Country Progressive and Labor Parties respectively, then commissioned the latter to form Victoria's third Labor administration, which was sworn in on 20 May, with the reported backing of the Country Progressives and one or two Independents.[74]

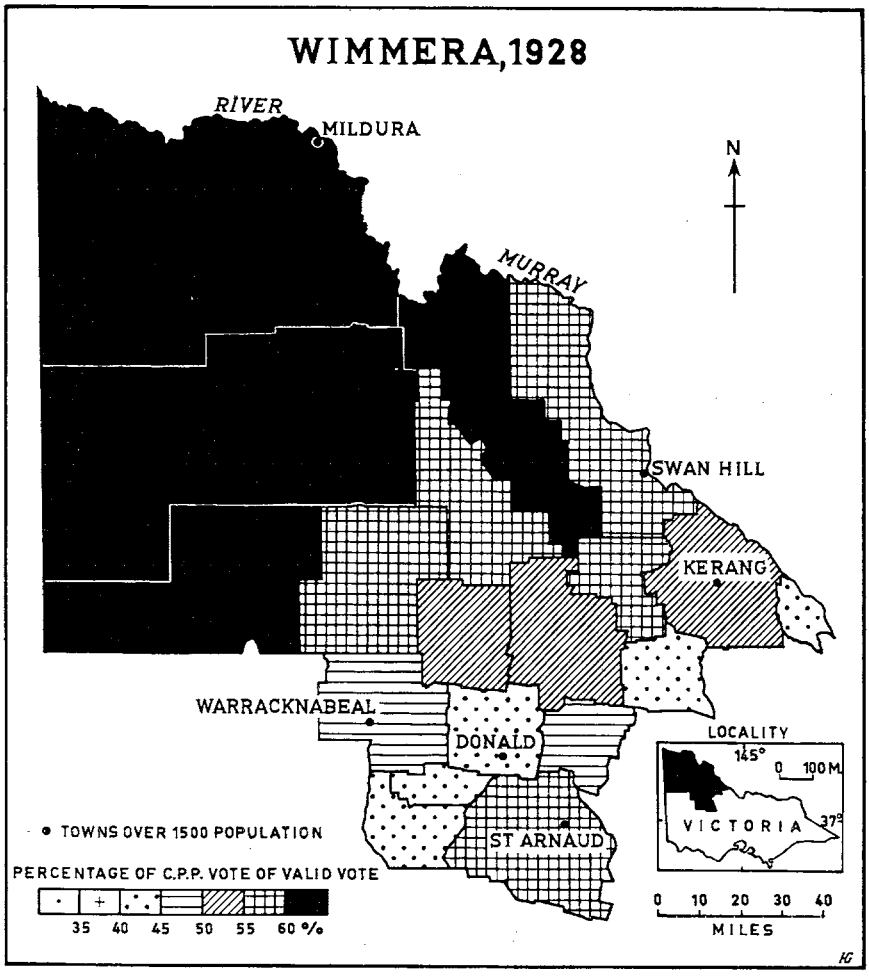
The struggle between the leaders of the Country and Country Progressive Parties was entering a new phase. Now that the Allan-Peacock coalition was no more, the Country Party had lost its main access to power and influence; on the other hand the Country Progressive Party, committed to the Hogan Ministry, was well placed to prove that the conditional-support strategy was the one best able to obtain results for rural interests and, if it could produce the promised concessions, was likely to attract what remained of the Country Party's popular following. The Country Party leaders realized this, and had either to come to terms (which meant Dunstan's terms) with the Country Progressive Party or to strengthen their alliance with the National Party in the hope that the next election would return the conservative parties to power. Allan chose the latter course, but the organizational leadership of the Victorian Country Party (V.C.P., as the V.F.U. had been renamed in March 1927) preferred to remain with the party's rank and file, amongst whom support for the principles of compulsory pooling, rural banking and tariff reductions was growing year by year.

Victoria: The Acceptance of the Conditional-Support Strategy, 1927-1930

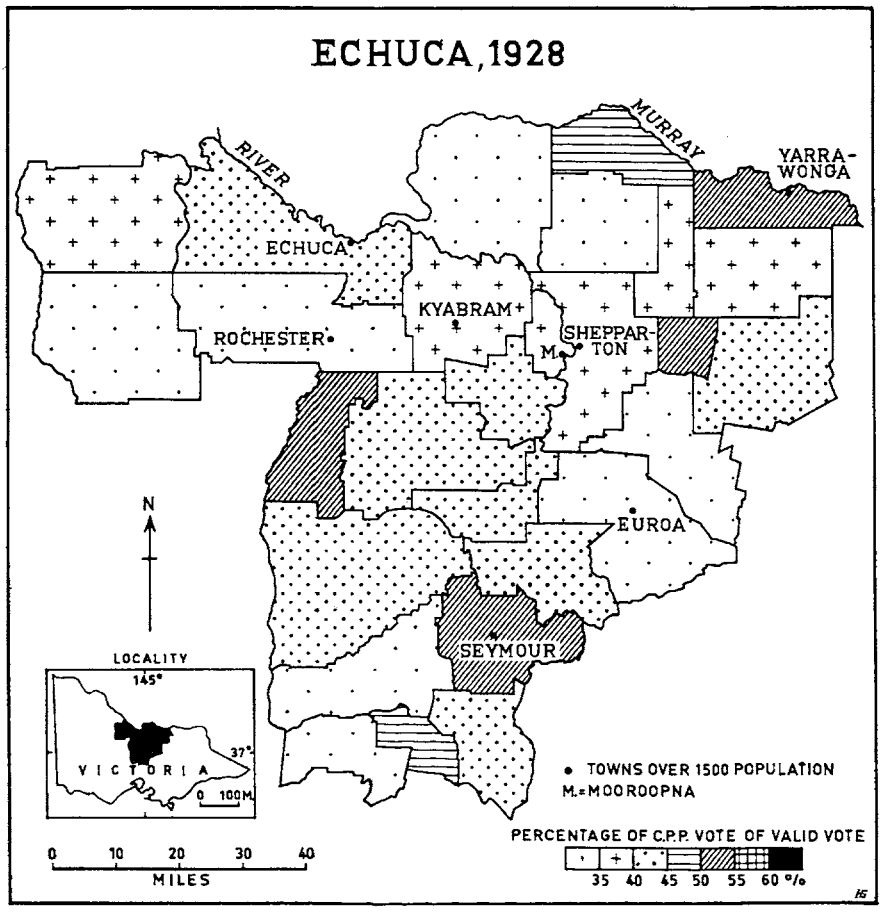
In the period from May 1927 to September 1930, two processes were at work within the Victorian Country Party movement. Firstly, the reunion of the Country and Country Progressives was gradually effected, and secondly, the movement as a whole shifted leftwards, both by endorsing the radical economic objectives of the Country Progressives and by reaccepting the conditional-support strategy as defined by Dunstan and Stewart.

The split was relatively easy to heal. Although the P.P.U. had established an ascendancy in the Mallee and in some parts of the Wimmera and Northern Districts, there remained pockets of V.C.P. support in all these regions, with the result that the cleavage between the organizations never became a sharp one either between regions or between social classes. In 1926 the P.P.U.'s monopoly of radical economic policies gave it an edge on its rival but by 1927 it had accepted what amounted to a truce at the local level. The extent of the co-existence between the two parties was shown clearly during the federal election of 17 November 1928, in the contests for the Wimmera and Echuca constituencies, where the only contestants were

[74] *Argus*, 4-6, 14, 16 May 1927.



6 Wimmera, 1928



7 Echuca, 1928

Country Party and Country Progressive Party nominees. The result of the poll, shown in Maps 6 and 7,[75] brings out the strength of the Country Progressive Party in the Mallee (the northern two-thirds of the Wimmera electorate) and suggests, as do the State election results for 1927 and 1929, that its second major zone of support conformed to the eastward extension of the wheatbelt through the Donald, St Arnaud, and Bendigo districts. By contrast, the Country Party had secure backing in the established fruit and dairying districts to the east and south-west of Echuca, and in the pastoral country which enclosed the Goulburn Valley. What is most striking, however, is the relative evenness of the result, indicating that only in a few subdivisions had either party established a completely commanding position.

Reconciliation was also assisted by the efforts of the movement's important centre group to restore the party's unity and influence. This group had lost faith in Allan, not because he had become too conservative or too obsessed with the coalition strategy, but because under him the party's parliamentarians had lost their grip on policy and the organization had split into two roughly equal halves. Had he successfully isolated and then expelled the radical leaders and prevented them from recruiting a following, they might eventually have accepted his views on strategy, if not on policy. However, once the radicals had not only captured half the organization but, with a small parliamentary party of four members, established an avenue to influence on policy at a time when such influence was badly needed, the V.C.P. moderates decided that Dunstan was more of a realist than Allan. Pragmatists first and doctrinaires second, the centre group accepted the conditional-support strategy once more because it produced results.

Before dealing with the relations between the P.P.U. and the V.C.P. during the reconciliation period, it is interesting to look briefly at the parliamentary history of the late twenties. The Hogan Ministry held office from 20 May 1927 until 22 November 1928, during which time the Country Progressive members were able to claim the authorship of an impressive number of policies. They were partly responsible for the Postponement of Payments Act, 1927, by which a two-year moratorium was established in the drought-stricken Mallee districts, and for the decision to hold a growers' ballot on the compulsory wheat pool proposal,[76] held in May 1928, which resulted in a narrow 'No' majority. They also claimed credit for two bills which were not enacted, a Rural Bank Bill and a Stamps (Sheep Duty) Bill, the latter to authorize a levy on sheep slaughtered in northern abattoirs to finance the northern co-operative freezing companies. All these

[75] The data for these maps were prepared by Mrs Patricia Corbett and Miss Geraldine O'Connell of the Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University.

[76] See *Argus*, 8-9 Feb. 1928.

measures were opposed by the Country Party, which voted against the government in nine-tenths of the divisions taken during its term.

However, the alliance between the Labor and Country Progressive Parties was certain to break up once Hogan, as he was bound to do, brought in a bill for a further redistribution of electorates. Not only did the existing balance of seats, with its heavy rural bias, impede Labor's chances of winning power with an absolute majority of the Assembly seats, but it greatly exaggerated the Country Parties' real political strength. The accompanying table shows the extent to which they were over-represented at this time.

Country Party Over-representation, 1920–1929

Election date	*Country Party seats as percentage of total seats*	*Enrolments in Country Party seats as percentage of total enrolments*
21 Oct. 1920	20·00	13·65
30 Aug. 1921	18·46	13·15
26 Jun. 1924	20·00	14·08
9 Apr. 1927	15·38	9·76
30 Nov. 1929	16·92	10·78

Had Victorian electorates been equitably distributed in the twenties, the National Party would certainly have retained its absolute majority in 1920 and the Labor Party would have won an absolute majority, if not in 1924, then in 1927. It was to deal with this problem that Hogan introduced, on 31 October 1928, a bill designed to alter the ratio of city to country seats from 26:39 to 32:34[77] (later changed to 31:34), although he was well aware that Dunstan's men ('the four black crows') would not accept the measure. The end came in confusion. On 8 November, McPherson (now leader of the National Party) moved a no-confidence motion in the government for its handling of labour troubles on the waterfront, and Dunstan later intimated that his group would support the government only if the Electoral Districts Bill were shelved. When this request was not granted, he moved an amendment to the censure motion criticizing the government for its redistribution proposals. On this and a later test motion the ministry suffered defeat.[78] Hogan asked the Governor for a dissolution, but the latter commissioned McPherson to form a government.[79]

In view of the fact that the National Party consisted of only 18 members in a House of 65 (it had won the Gippsland South seat,

[77] *V.P.D.*, vol. 178, 31 Oct. 1928, pp. 2610-58.

[78] Ibid., 8 Nov. 1928, pp. 2739-48; 13 Nov. 1928, p. 2842; 14 Nov. 1928, pp. 2937-8; 20 Nov. 1928, p. 2961. On Dunstan's bargaining, see ibid., p. 2945; 28 Nov. 1928, p. 3013

[79] *Argus*, 22 Nov. 1928.

formerly held by an Independent, in a by-election in late 1927), McPherson was extremely fortunate to have received a commission at all. He was reported to have given the Governor 'assurances of adequate support',[80] presumably from the three remaining Independents and from the Country and Country Progressive Parties. Some surprise was expressed that the Country Party had not been offered a coalition agreement and that McPherson had formed a minority government. However, according to one report, Allan stated that 'there was a complete understanding between Sir William McPherson and himself' and that although 'most Country party members would have preferred a composite Ministry they have accepted the position equably'.[81] Nevertheless, in January 1929, the secretary to the parliamentary Country Party said that McPherson had not consulted the Country Party 'as to whether an election would be advisable or upon the method by which stable Government should be carried on'.[82] In fact, both the National and Country Party leaders had good reasons for avoiding a coalition agreement on this occasion, the Nationalists because they had unpleasant memories of the Allan-Peacock coalition and the Country Party leaders because they were anxious not to play into the hands of the Country Progressives, whose criticism of the coalition strategy was now carrying a great deal of weight in rural areas. Sir Frederic Eggleston recalled that:

> these composite ministries were intensely unpopular among town supporters of the Liberals, who despised the country ministers as horny-handed sons of the soil. Liberal ministers found that they had an undue proportion of ministerial work because their country colleagues were too uneducated to take their share.[83]

McPherson announced on taking office that he would confer with both Dunstan and Allan 'regarding the measures to be introduced'[84] and his ministry showed unusual concern for the needs of certain rural interests. Despite his party's previous objection to compulsory pooling, McPherson had a cabinet sub-committee study the question. This body recommended the drawing up of a marketing bill which would provide for the formation of compulsory pools subject to approval by growers' ballots, in keeping with similar New South Wales and Queensland legislation. The government also put through a generous Cultivation Advances Bill and approved a bank guarantee to keep open the Ballarat and Bendigo freezing works.[85] By the end

[80] *V.P.D.*, vol. 179, 9 July 1929, p. 82.

[81] *Argus*, 22 Nov. 1928. Cf. his later statement in the *Sun-News Pictorial*, 26 Jan. 1929.

[82] *Argus*, 30 Jan. 1929.

[83] F. W. Eggleston, *Reflections of an Australian Liberal*, p. 105.

[84] *Argus*, 23 Nov. 1928

[85] Ibid., 10 Oct., 11 July 1929.

of 1929, however, the Country Progressives had repaired their alliance with the Labor Party, agreeing with them that a relief programme was essential for both farmers and workers. Together they defeated the government on an adjournment motion,[86] and, after a dissolution had been granted, an election was held on 30 November 1929.

In a campaign which closely resembled that of 1927, the parties again grouped themselves into two blocs, with the Country and National Parties on one side and the Labor and Country Progressive Parties on the other. Nationalist and Country Party candidates competed against each other in only four electorates, and only one sitting member of the Country Progressive Party (A. G. Allnutt, Mildura) was opposed by a Labor candidate. The election saw a slight increase in Labor strength, but otherwise the party numbers remained much the same, the position in the new Assembly being Labor 30, Country Progressive 4, National 17, Country Party 11, Australian Liberal 1 and Independents 2. When Parliament met in December the two Independents and the four Country Progressives voted with Labor to defeat the McPherson Ministry on a no-confidence motion,[87] thereby enabling Hogan to form another Labor government, which again held office with the support of the Country Progressive Party. On the surface, this appeared to be a return to the situation of May 1927 when the first Hogan Ministry had been formed, but the Labor leader was already under heavy pressure to change his strategy. At the Victorian A.L.P. conference of April 1929 a resolution had been passed which forbade the party leader to form a government without the approval of his parliamentary party or caucus, and a minority of the delegates had wanted to go further and to bar the party from taking office without an absolute majority in Parliament. In the following year, moreover, Hogan was strongly criticized for having given the Country Progressives a free run in the Mallee seats at the 1929 election.[88] In other words, the special conditions which had made the Country Progressive Party's conditional-support strategy so fruitful were in danger of being changed.

Let us now return to the internal politics of the Country Party movement, where the debate about the party's proper place in the party system had reached a decisive stage. Allan and his parliamentary colleagues had tried hard to encourage the V.C.P. organization to accept a close formal relationship with the Victorian National Federation, but without success.

In fact, Allan appears to have greatly over-estimated his power over the V.C.P. and to have been thinking in terms of a close union between the National and Country Parties, perhaps along the lines

[86] *V.P.D.*, vol. 180, 23 Oct. 1929, pp. 2512-42; 24 Oct. 1929, pp. 2547-8.

[87] Ibid., vol. 181, 11 Dec. 1929, p. 64.

[88] See D. W. Rawson, 'The Organisation of the Australian Labor Party, 1916-1941', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1954, pp. 195-9.

of the Queensland Country and Progressive National Party.[89] When the Assembly met on 6 July 1927, just after he had resigned as Premier, a group of Labor members who came early to the Chamber and found him sitting alone in the ministerial benches called to him, 'You will never get back there, John'; to which he replied, 'You will have to keep your eyes skinned to stop me.'[90]

He was now much more outspoken about his political ideas than he had been in the early twenties, and no longer apologized for his support of the coalition strategy. In May 1928 he said that he was personally 'opposed to Labour. When first associated with the Country party he was inclined to sit on a rail, although he did not like doing it, but he would never do so again.'[91] Underlying this statement was the assumption that the Country Party's earlier neutrality had been a mistaken policy, since it ignored the fact that the main struggle was between the Labor and National Parties and that sectional interests had to be subordinated to the wider class interests of the farmers in the struggle against the trade unions and the Labor Party. From his point of view, the breakaway of the agrarian radicals had made possible a reversion to the two-party simplicity of the pre-war period, in which the Country Party would revert to its former status as an important faction of the conservative bloc. An editorial in the *Countryman* made the point in this way:

> the split [of 1926] placed the farmers, politically, in exactly the same position as that previous to the formation of the V.F.U., viz., Nationalist and Labor. As a consequence of the split, those withdrawing from the union automatically returned to Labor, even as those remaining automatically became Nationalist.[92]

Allan's difficulty was to persuade the V.C.P. branches to accept this view of the party system. The first trial balloon had been flown as early as May 1927 by Frank Old, who had told a Swan Hill meeting that a unified non-Labor party should be formed to keep Labor from power.

> He would even be prepared to see the Country party scrapped as an organisation, providing other organisations were prepared to be thrown into the melting pot to produce a better State-wide organisation which could be used authoritatively by the electors to carry out a programme better than the composite Ministry had attempted. He believed that such an organisation was possible and necessary.[93]

There was some talk of forming a united 'Democratic Party' but on 26 May 1927 the V.C.P. Central Council censured Old for his statement and recommended to Allan that the party remain 'in an Inde-

[89] He later admitted this objective publicly, see *Argus*, 5 Apr. 1929.
[90] Ibid., 7 July 1927.
[91] Ibid., 8 May 1928.
[92] *Countryman* (Melb.), 20 Jan. 1928.
[93] *Argus*, 19 May 1927.

pendent position'.[94] In May 1928 Allan returned to the fray with an appeal for 'unity and a return to political stability' to prevent the advent of 'Langism' (that is, the kinds of policies associated with J. T. Lang's New South Wales Labor Ministry, 1925-7) in Victoria. McPherson then suggested that a 'compact Opposition party' should be formed, 'with a metropolitan centre and a rural wing', and he and Allan held talks with this object in view. A meeting of the parliamentary Country Party, however, rejected their proposal that National and Country Party managers should be appointed to work out the details of the merger. McPherson and Allan made another attempt to bring about such a union in 1929, though again without success, and another round of negotiations with country Nationalists began in December 1929 and continued into 1930.[95]

The characteristic feature of all these attempts to produce a measure of National-Country Party unity was the inability of Allan and his supporters to gain the confidence of the V.C.P. branches, who were being attracted increasingly to the doctrine and strategy of the Country Progressives. Dunstan and Stewart were bargaining from a position of great strength; electorally, their party had established a secure hold on the State constituencies of Mildura, Ouyen, Benalla and Eaglehawk, while Stewart had no difficulty in retaining the Wimmera seat in both the 1928 and 1929 federal elections; in Parliament, their influence on proceedings far outweighed their numbers; in the field of pressure-group activity, both the P.P.U. and its non-partisan off-shoot, the Wheatgrowers' Association, formed the vanguard in the campaign for compulsory wheat pooling and the bulk-handling of wheat. The V.C.P., however, had concentrated on building up its own branch strength; the way for an intensive membership drive had been opened by its 1927 conference, which had provided for the recruitment of country townsmen as members and had adopted the bank-order system (whereby a member authorized his bank to pay his subscription automatically each year) for the collection of membership fees.[96] By 1929 indeed the number of V.C.P. branches had risen to 250,[97] compared with a low point of about 150 branches immediately after the 1926 split. But the V.C.P. maintained its organizational strength only by reflecting the views of its members, which became increasingly radical and increasingly sympathetic to the policy and strategy of the Country Progressives. At its conference of March 1928, for example, the V.C.P. came out in favour of compulsory wheat pooling and later its branches began to criticize Allan's adherence to the Nationalist alliance. The V.C.P. conference of March 1929 declared outright for reunion with the Country Progressives, despite

[94] *V.C.P. Central Council Minutes*, vol. 3, 26 May 1927, p. 149.

[95] *Argus*, 25 May, 1, 7 June 1928; 5 Apr., 5 Sept., 11 Dec. 1929; 21 Mar., 22 May 1930.

[96] Ibid., 17-19 Mar. 1927.

[97] Ibid., 28 June 1929.

Allan's objections, and Harold Hanslow, then chairman of the Kyabram District Council, gave notice that he intended to move at the next conference that the 1924 resolution approving coalitions be rescinded.[98]

In April and May 1929 representatives of both the V.C.P. and the P.P.U. met in unity conferences, which failed because the V.C.P. delegates refused to accept the Country Progressives' prerequisite for reunification, an undertaking that the Country Party would not enter coalitions except in the event of war.[99] Aware that time was on its side, the P.P.U. conference of September 1929 declared that it would accept reunion only on 'a basis of independence, with no pact or coalition'.[1] However, the V.C.P. rank and file began to take matters into their own hands; a large meeting of members of both organizations in the Mildura district decided in December 1929 that it would accept the principle of opposition to coalitions and pacts as the condition of reunion,[2] and the pressure of such local meetings ultimately broke the deadlock. The merger of the two parties finally took place at a conference held in September 1930, when it was agreed that parliamentarians should in future be excluded from the Central Council; that this body would sanction a coalition only by a two-thirds majority and then only if the Country Party obtained six portfolios (including the Premiership) in the cabinet.[3] It will be noted that the principle of coalitions had not been excluded altogether, but much more exacting conditions had been imposed than had been the case, for instance, in 1924. Under Allan's leadership, the reunited parliamentary group continued to support the Hogan Ministry in office, and Albert Dunstan, the radical of the twenties, now began to dominate Victorian politics, as he was to do for more than a decade.

After the elections of May 1932, in which the Labor Party lost heavily, Dunstan, Allan and another Country Party member accepted posts in a coalition formed by Sir Stanley Argyle, then leader of the United Australia Party (U.A.P., the former National Party). The V.C.P. conference of March 1933 attacked the coalition agreement, which by no means conformed to the terms set out in September 1930, elected a 'reform' group to the Central Council, and their new champion, A. E. Hocking, became president of the organization. Under Hocking the V.C.P. Central Council kept steady pressure on the parliamentary party to break with the U.A.P. and withdraw its ministers from the coalition, but Dunstan, who took over the party leadership from Allan in 1933, refused to give any ground. After the 1935 elections, however, Hocking was able to force the Country Party ministers to withdraw from the Argyle Ministry, and when the new

[98] Ibid., 15 Mar., 1 Nov. 1928; 29 Jan., 1, 12, 20 Feb., 23 Mar. 1929.

[99] For the first conference see ibid., 25 Apr. 1929; *Countryman* (Melb.), 26 Apr. 1929, and for the second see *Argus*, 18 May 1929; 27 Mar. 1930.

[1] Ibid., 23 Sept. 1929. [2] Ibid., 21 Dec. 1929. [3] Ibid., 24 Sept. 1930.

Assembly met, the Country and Labor Parties combined to vote the government out of office. Dunstan then formed a purely Country Party ministry which held office with Labor support until July 1942 and with U.A.P. support until the 1943 elections, after which another non-Labor coalition was formed.[4] The Mallee radicals protested against this return to the coalition strategy, this time without avail, for the factors which had given such force to the radical protests of 1926-7 and 1932-3 no longer obtained. After the depression of the early thirties, much of the northern Mallee, the cradle of agrarian radicalism in the twenties, had been declared a marginal area; many of the small settlers had left it and the holdings were being regrouped into larger units or allowed to revert to their natural state. Further, the federal Labor government's wheat-price guarantee of 1942 had increased the tendency of small farmers to look to the A.L.P. rather than to the Country Party as the representative of agrarian radicalism, while in regions such as the Wimmera and the Goulburn Valley farmers found themselves much more secure, financially and socially, than they had been during the Country Party's hey-day. For all these reasons, the radicals failed to win support and the V.C.P. conference of 1944 not only approved the coalition but readmitted parliamentarians to the Central Council, from which they had been excluded in 1930.[5]

In the context of the late twenties, however, the revivalism and radicalism of the Country Progressive Party had an important impact on the country party movement throughout Australia. It stood for militancy and purpose at a time when the orthodox Country Parties, committed to the compromises and the political greyness of coalitions, were losing confidence. We may never know how close some of them came to complete collapse before the politics of the depression period gave them a new lease of life.

[4] On the Victorian Country Party in the thirties see J. B. Paul, 'The Premiership of Sir Albert Dunstan', M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1960.

[5] *Age*, 30 Mar. 1944.

8

Orthodox Country Parties in Government and Opposition, 1925-1929

Towards the end of the 1920s, the Country Parties were beginning to decline. The signs, though scattered, were unmistakable—the loss of one or two electorates, the reluctance to support radical demands, angry remarks at a conference, and so on. In some cases, as the parliamentary Country Parties became increasingly dependent on the Nationalists, they lost their separate status altogether; electoral pacts became more restrictive; increasing numbers of small farmers transferred their allegiance to the Labor Party; and farmers' pressure groups grew more critical of the Federal Country Party's refusal to take a firm stand on tariff and marketing issues. Although the Country Parties managed to recover their lost support during the highly charged politics of the early thirties when their brand of revivalism was at its most effective, the period from about 1925 to 1929 was one in which their strategy of joining coalitions and forming electoral alliances with the Nationalists was proving inadequate in the face of rural discontent.

Decline was most rapid in those States where the movement had not had a chance to take deep root. In Tasmania, where a small party had led a precarious existence between 1922 and 1925, the Farmers, Stockowners and Orchardists' Association showed no signs of wanting to try again, despite requests from the federal organization.[1] In Queensland, the Country Party had in November 1925 merged with the United Party, the result being the Country and Progressive National Party,[2] which came to power after the State election of 11 May 1929. However, there was no suggestion that the resultant ministry was in any way a coalition; to all intents and purposes the Queensland Country Party had ceased to exist, the only remnants of its previous influence being the convention that the federal members for Maranoa and Wide Bay, J. A. J. Hunter and B. H. Corser respectively, should remain within the Federal Country Party.

In South Australia, where a Labor government held office between

[1] Hobart *Mercury*, 31 Aug. 1927; 30 Aug. 1928.

[2] Brisbane *Courier*, 20 Nov. 1925. On the C.P.N.P. during the 1925-9 period, see Z. Abidin, 'The Origins and Development of the Queensland Country Party, 1909-1932', M.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1958, pp. 135-49.

April 1924 and April 1927, the Country Party Association (C.P.A.) came under heavy pressure to merge with the powerful Liberal Federation. In August 1926, after protracted negotiations, both organizations agreed to 'use their best efforts to effect a closer union' and arranged for a joint policy statement in the 1927 election, the allocation of certain seats to the Country Party and the co-operation of the two parliamentary groups in supporting any subsequent non-Labor government.[3] The pact was strictly observed in the campaign which preceded the election of 26 March 1927, when the Labor Ministry was defeated, the final result being Liberal 23, Country Party 5, Independent Country Party 1, Labor 16, and Independent Labor 1. In the government formed by R. L. Butler after the resignation of the Labor administration, the Country Party leader, M. McIntosh, was included as Commissioner of Public Works and Minister of Education, and the Liberals again pressed the C.P.A. to agree to the complete fusion of the two parties. Four of the five members of the parliamentary Country Party were persuaded to join the Liberal group,[4] the odd man out being the rather hot-tempered, headstrong, A. G. Cameron, who was later to become leader of the Federal Country Party. The Liberal Party's next moves were to refuse to recognize the federal electoral pact, which stood to benefit the Country Party in South Australia,[5] and to amend the State Electoral Act in an effort to penalize independent or third-party candidates. The electoral method employed in South Australia until that time had been simple majority voting in two-member constituencies, which obliged the Country Party either to contest only a few seats or to split the non-Labor vote, as it had done in 1924. While this had indeed prevented it from making a decisive electoral breakthrough, its ability to split majorities had placed it in a strong bargaining position with the Liberals, something which the Butler government was determined to destroy.

The Act passed in 1929 retained the two-member constituencies but replaced simple majority voting by the system of block-voting then being used for elections to the Commonwealth Senate, whereby preference votes were distributed to ensure election by absolute majority. However, unlike the Hare-Clark system of proportional representation, in which the preferences of an elected candidate were reduced to the value of his surplus votes, this Act provided that the whole of an

[3] 'Particulars of Negotiations of the Liberal Federation with the Country Party Association which commenced in September, 1925 and reached a Successful Conclusion with the Formation of the Liberal and Country League on June 9th, 1932' (cyclostyled MS. made available by the Liberal Country League office, Adelaide), p. 2. On general relations between the Country and Liberal Parties at this time, see *Advertiser*, 27-31 Jan., 5 Feb. 1927, and A. G. Cameron's remarks in *S.A.P.D.*, vol. 1, 2 Aug. 1927, pp. 211-12.

[4] M. McIntosh, F. M. McMillan and J. C. Carter went over in Feb. 1928 (*Advertiser*, 14 Feb. 1928) and E. Coles in April (ibid., 21 Apr. 1928).

[5] 'Particulars of Negotiations etc.', pp. 3-5; *Advertiser*, 11 Feb. 1928.

elected candidate's preference votes were to be distributed at their full value, thereby ensuring that the party whose candidates polled the highest number of primary votes would secure all the seats in a given electorate and not a share proportionate with their vote.[6] As a result the C.P.A. stood little chance in the 1930 election. Cameron and another Country Party member were returned for Wooroora, but this was the last flicker of resistance; in 1932 the C.P.A. finally gave way and amalgamated with the Liberal Federation to form the Liberal and Country League.[7]

In New South Wales, Western Australia, and Victoria, on the other hand, the Country Parties were able to survive and the Federal Country Party managed to maintain its strength. In each case the problem of survival was different. The Western Australian party was isolated in opposition to a strong Labor government for six years; the New South Wales party had to fight for living space between an aggressive Labor Party and an unsympathetic National Party; in the Commonwealth Parliament, Page found increasing difficulty in obtaining the concessions demanded by his followers; and in Victoria, as we have seen, survival depended on healing the split between the radical and conservative wings of the party. The New South Wales party showed a surprising adaptability in meeting the threats to its existence.

New South Wales: From the Lang Ministry to the Bavin-Buttenshaw Coalition

The Labor Ministry which J. T. Lang formed in June 1925 soon became a subject of controversy throughout Australia. Previous Labor administrations had adjusted themselves to the essentially conservative tone of Australian society and had been conspicuously moderate in their programmes, but Lang brought to politics a fierce radicalism and a rugged style which quite disconcerted his opponents. 'Langism' became the Australian term for recklessness in reform. By present standards the furore was unwarranted, since Lang was more a nationalist than a Social Democrat, more a pragmatic reformer in the tradition of Richard Seddon and Richard Parkes than a man with a revolutionary doctrine. The most disturbing thing about him was his political technique, both in controlling the New South Wales Labor Party and in appealing to the underprivileged. The 'Big Fella', as he became known, had more than a touch of the populist about him.

For all these reasons, New South Wales conservatives insisted that the time had come to bring the Country Party under control and to oblige it either to merge with the National Party or to accept a comprehensive political alliance. This feeling was also shared by many

[6] See Butler's remarks, *S.A.P.D.*, vol. 1, 11 Sept. 1929, p. 1041; *Advertiser*, 30 Aug. 1929.

[7] See ibid., 10 June 1932, and 'Particulars of Negotiations etc.', pp. 5-8.

rural groups, including the Graziers' Association, whose pressure on the Country Party was direct and effective during this period. The F.S.A. on the other hand, along with members of the parliamentary Country Party such as Bruxner and Drummond, remained convinced that the Country Party needed to retain a large measure of independence if it were to protect its supporting interests. The outcome was an alliance, not a merger, and the alliance itself was gained only after a number of steps.

As in the period 1911-12, Labor's interest in extending the scope of industrial arbitration aroused strong feeling amongst the farming communities, which might otherwise have been impressed by Lang's policy of increasing state controls over produce marketing. The most controversial Labor measures were put through during the second and third sessions of the Parliament, between August 1925 and March 1926; a Rural Workers Accommodation Act laid down in great detail the housing conditions for workers on small farms; the Workers Compensation Act applied not only to rural workers but also to contractors and their labourers, timbergetters and even sharefarmers, all of whom were entitled to claim compensation for injury from the small farmers employing them; the Industrial Arbitration Amendment Act established an Industrial Commission in place of the State Arbitration Court and empowered it to declare an annual basic wage for rural as well as urban labour. As if such measures were not enough, the government next set out to abolish the Legislative Council; the appointment of twenty-five new Labor members to the Council in December 1925 was followed in January 1926 by the introduction of an abolition bill, which would have been passed had not three Labor members changed sides. It was later reported that the Governor, Sir Dudley de Chair, had acted on the advice of the British Secretary of State for the Colonies in refusing a request for additional appointments.[8] This reprieve did not prevent a wave of protest motions from sweeping the countryside.[9]

As it happened, the Lang Ministry was obliged to moderate its policies not by the threat of external opposition but by a dispute within the Labor Party. A number of its rural members left the party towards the end of 1926 with the result that Lang, without a majority in the Assembly, was forced to obtain a financial appropriation for four months on the understanding that he would arrange for an early election. Subsequently, the dissident members were persuaded to rejoin the party after the intervention of the Federal A.L.P. Executive. Lang then recalled Parliament and secured the adoption of his budget proposals. Further trouble occurred in April 1927, when a special conference of trade union and branch delegates declared for the

[8] *S.M.H.*, 10 Mar. 1926; 3 Mar. 1927.

[9] See D. W. Rawson, 'The Organisation of the Australian Labor Party, 1916-1941', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1954, pp. 105-6.

expulsion of the three main rebels from the party and for the adoption of the so-called 'Red Rules', which had been prepared by a revision committee. These decisions precipitated a bitter faction fight which all but paralysed the New South Wales Labor Party, whereupon Lang resigned his commission, formed a new cabinet composed entirely of his own supporters, and arranged for an election in October 1927. Finally, in July 1927, he was able at a further special conference to regain control of the party organization.[10] Meanwhile, the Country and National Parties had been drawing the attention of the electors to what were described as efforts to establish 'Lang dictatorship' and 'indirect rule from Moscow'.

They had also been drawing closer together. The conditions for a *rapprochement* had been created in 1925 by a change of leadership; in September of that year Bruxner, who wanted to devote more time to his private business, had resigned as Country Party leader to make way for E. A. Buttenshaw, and in December T. R. Bavin replaced Sir George Fuller as leader of the National Party. Buttenshaw was a milder man than Bruxner, and more open to the suggestion that the Country Party should repair its relations with the Nationalists, while Bavin, who had been a member of the Progressive Party until the True Blue split of December 1921, understood the problems of dealing with the smaller party much better than Fuller had done. In August 1925, moreover, the Country Party had dropped the old 'Progressive' label in favour of the more obvious title, thus signifying amongst other things that it was no longer interested in competing with the Nationalists in city and large-town electorates.[11]

There were also electoral reasons for a non-Labor alliance. Under the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections (Amendment) Act of 1926, the earlier system of modified proportional representation had been replaced by a system of single-member constituencies and optional preferential voting, that is a voting method in which electors were permitted, but not obliged, to indicate their preferences where more than two candidates were offering. This provision gave some scope for an overlapping of Nationalist and Country Party candidacies, providing an exchange of preferences was arranged, but there was a distinct possibility that the government would introduce simple majority voting, a proposal contained in its original bill of October 1925.[12] Buttenshaw pointed out that the time had come for some form of electoral alliance:

[10] Ibid., pp. 104-14; J. T. Lang, *I Remember*, pp. 311-13; Graham, 'Strategies of the Australian Country Parties', pp. 381-3.

[11] On the change of title see Ellis, *Countryman* (Syd.), Jan. 1951, and on the change of leadership see *S.M.H.*, 11 Dec. 1925; Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, pp. 95-6.

[12] The government was obliged to accept a Legislative Council amendment in favour of optional preferential voting (see *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 106, 3 Mar. 1926, pp. 542-6).

> If single electorates with first past the post are introduced, then it would be suicidal to run more than one candidate in opposition. Even with single electorates and contingent voting it will be necessary to discourage the running of a number of candidates.
> I am of the opinion that, in the best interests of the State, we should earnestly endeavour to come to a better understanding with the National Party and eliminate as far as possible the loss of votes that frequently occurs in carrying out preferences.[13]

The formal negotiations for an agreement began in November 1926, by which time the provisional boundaries for the new electorates had been published. Prompted by the Federal Executive of the National Party, the New South Wales National Association suggested a series of arrangements and authorized Bavin to confer with the Country Party.[14] The principle of negotiations was approved by the General Council of the Graziers' Association, whose president, C. G. Waddell, stated that the Country and National Parties had a common task in 'the defeat of the Labour party, which is absolutely controlled by an extremist body of outsiders, who try to set up a sort of Moscow dictatorship for the supposedly free Parliament of New South Wales'.[15] By an agreement concluded in December, both parties agreed to form a joint committee, consisting of four Country Party and four Nationalist representatives, with authority to allocate each country electorate to whichever party was most likely to win it and to settle disputes beween candidates. Where a clash between Country Party and National candidates could not be avoided, preferences were to be exchanged and mutual recrimination avoided. It was also understood that 'the parties will arrive at an agreement in respect of fundamental items of policy for the forthcoming elections and for enactment by the next Parliament'.[16]

The choice of the eight members[17] of the joint committee reflected the range of interests involved. Besides four parliamentarians (Bavin and R. T. Ball for the National Party and Buttenshaw and Bruxner for the Country Party) there were four representatives of the 'outside organizations'; Waddell and A. K. Trethowan, although appointed by the Country Party Central Council, were in fact present on behalf of the Graziers' Association and the F.S.A. respectively, and A. M. Hemsley and Sir William Vicars, ostensibly representing the Executive Committee of the National Association, were probably more responsible to the Consultative Council, the finance committee which controlled the distribution of political funds donated by pastoral, commercial,

[13] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1926, p. 30.

[14] *S.M.H.*, 9 Nov. 1926.

[15] Ibid., 26 Nov. 1926.

[16] Ibid., 15 Dec. 1926. See also Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, p. 101, based on *Country Party Central Council Minutes*, 8 Dec. 1926.

[17] *S.M.H.*, 3 June 1927.

insurance, and shipping interests. In short, the joint committee may have discussed not only the distribution of seats but the arrangements for ensuring that the election money available was spent to the best advantage, and it is possible that the Country Party's financial gain from the alliance was considerable.

In any case, the agreement with regard to seats was reached on 27 May 1927 and enforced with surprisingly little friction. The Country Party was given fifteen electorates (six more than it required for its sitting members) arranged in two blocs, one a solid group of six seats in the New England region and the other a cluster of nine electorates in the Central West.[18] Policies were concerted, and the policy speeches delivered by Bavin and Buttenshaw during the election campaign were suitably alike.[19] Rather than discuss their somewhat different approaches to marketing and local government problems, the non-Labor parties chose to emphasize their unity in opposition to Langism. According to the *Land*:

> The main issue of this election is simple. What Mr. Lang is asking is that the electors should give him extended power, so that he may complete the infamous task of destroying responsible government which has been forced upon him by the Red extremists who operate through the Trades Hall; what the Country Party and the Nationalists are asking is that they shall cast a decisive vote in favour of the restoration of responsible government.[20]

Within the two regions assigned to it, the Country Party organized carefully. It was able to draw on the resources of 284 branches of the F.S.A., 98 Local Committees of the Graziers' Association, and about 300 branches of the party built up in the space of months by Colonel E. J. Munro, who had been appointed General Secretary of the Country Party in February 1927.[21] The election, held on 8 October 1927, produced the desired outcome; Labor lost its majority and the non-Labor parties gained control of the new Assembly, the detailed result being National 33, Independent National 2, Country Party 13, Labor 40, and Independent Labor 2.

The days of conditional-support were behind the Country Party, whose leaders did not now hesitate to accept the principle of a

[18] Ibid.

[19] See 'New South Wales Elections, 8 October, 1927. The National Policy. Speech delivered by Hon. T. R. Bavin, M.L.A., Chatswood, 8 September, 1927', Sydney, 1927; 'The Country Party of N.S.W. Policy Speech delivered by Mr. E. A. Buttenshaw, M.L.A., West Wyalong, 13 September, 1927', Sydney, 1927.

[20] *Land*, 30 Sept. 1927.

[21] *S.M.H.*, 5 Aug. 1927. On organizational trends in the New South Wales Country Party during the twenties, see D. A. Aitkin, 'The Organisation of the Australian Country Party (N.S.W.), 1946 to 1962', Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 1964, pp. 22-5.

coalition government. Their only difficulty was the weakness of their bargaining position, for although the electoral pact had enabled them to increase their parliamentary group by four members it had greatly increased their dependence on the Nationalists; the brave days of the True Blue spirit were no more. When Bavin met Buttenshaw on 11 October he offered him a mere two portfolios, a number later raised to three. On the 13th Buttenshaw reported the state of negotiations to the Country Party Central Council, which accepted the coalition proposal and left the matter of further bargaining to him. Bruxner, however, emphasized the need for the party to enter the coalition with sufficient men 'to make it a vitalising force'. On the 14th Buttenshaw asked Bavin for five portfolios, but the National Party leader refused this request and renewed his original offer of three places. When this was reported to the Central Council, it resolved: 'That as the Country Party would be compelled to accept equal responsibility of Composite Government, this Council considers that the Country Party should have substantial representation in the Cabinet compatible with its responsibility.' In addition, Trethowan undertook to see Sir Owen Cox, a prominent member of the Consultative Council, to ascertain whether his influence could be used to obtain a settlement.[22] In the end, the Nationalists agreed to give the Country Party four places, and Bavin's cabinet included Buttenshaw as Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Works and Railways, V. C. Thorby as Minister of Agriculture, D. H. Drummond as Minister of Education, and Bruxner as Minister of Local Government. These were important posts, but there was no disguising the fact that the Country Party had been treated as an inferior partner; with only four places in a cabinet of fourteen, it had not been given either the portfolio for Lands or the post of Treasurer.

Loss of status was compensated by the influence over policy which cabinet representation gave the Country Party. Buttenshaw admitted that the party had changed its strategy, but pointed out that the ends more than justified the means.

> The policy of standing aloof and giving support for concessions could not achieve satisfactory results in the absence of actual participation in the initiation and framing of the measures to be brought before Parliament, and in the administration of the Government Departments.[23]

The coalition arrangement, based on the pattern already established in Commonwealth politics, worked smoothly enough throughout the

[22] See Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, pp. 104-5, based on *Country Party Central Council Minutes*, 13, 14 Oct. 1927, pp. 108-24, which I have also consulted. See in addition *S.M.H.*, 12-15 Oct. 1927; Ellis, *Countryman* (Syd.), Feb. 1951.

[23] 'The Country Party of New South Wales, Policy Speech', Sydney, 1930, p. 5. Cf. his remarks, N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1929, p. 89.

term of the 1927-30 Parliament. Bavin and Buttenshaw remained on friendly terms, and no important differences appear to have arisen between the two parts of the cabinet. The two parliamentary groups held separate meetings for routine purposes, although they held joint meetings on important occasions.[24] Buttenshaw was Acting Premier for two periods, once when Bavin was ill (in January 1928) and again when he was abroad for five months during the winter of 1929. Finally, in 1930, another electoral pact was arranged[25] and the two parties again co-operated closely in the subsequent campaign.

Each of the four Country Party ministers was able to influence the administration of his departments so as to provide conspicuous benefits for country interests. Drummond's achievements in the field of education[26] were matched by Bruxner's in local government policy. For example, Bruxner's Main Roads (Amendment) Act of 1927 restored the whole of motor-taxation revenue, part of which had been diverted to the general revenue by the Lang government, to the Main Roads Fund, and a further amending Act of 1929 reclassified country roads with the object of reducing the responsibility of country shires and municipalities for their maintenance and construction. The same measure replaced the previous annual allocation of £90,000 and £25,000 for country and Sydney roads respectively with a new annual grant from loan revenue of £300,000 for country and £200,000 for metropolitan roads, and provided an additional grant of £250,000 of loan money per annum for the construction of rural 'developmental' roads. During Bruxner's term as Minister, moreover, the Main Roads Board followed a policy of constructing cross-country roads to the outer ports, whereas the earlier system of main highways had tended to converge on Sydney.[27] While railway construction in the late twenties in general followed an established programme, interesting variations were recorded in the New England and Central West regions, where such projects as the Guyra-Dorrigo, Casino-Bonalbo, Grafton-South Grafton, Wyalong-Wamboyne and Ungarie-Naradhan lines were pushed ahead.[28] Although the Railway Commissioners had suggested (in a report conveniently shelved by the Lang Ministry) a general raising of freights and fares,[29] the government made no attempt to give effect to such proposals.

[24] See *S.M.H.*, 2 Nov. 1927; 26 July, 29 Aug., 26 Oct. 1928.

[25] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1930, p. 17.

[26] See Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, pp. 106-7.

[27] See the map given in *Main Roads* (issued by the Main Roads Board), Sydney, March 1930, p. 127. For a general survey of expenditure on country and city roads under the Main Roads Scheme see 'Report of the Department of Main Roads for the year ended 30th June, 1956', Pap. 64, *N.S.W. P.P.*, 1956.

[28] See budget statements, *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 113, 19 Apr. 1928, pp. 116-17; vol. 119, 10 Dec. 1929, p. 2270.

[29] *S.M.H.*, 22 Oct., 2 Dec. 1927.

Country Party influence was evident, too, in the field of industrial arbitration. Although the Industrial Arbitration (Amendment) Act had considerably reduced the power of the Industrial Commission instituted under the 1926 Act, the F.S.A. was still not satisfied. Its 1928 conference resolved that rural workers should be removed from the application of the Act altogether, and its executive negotiated with Buttenshaw to have the necessary changes brought about.[30] In June 1929, Buttenshaw announced that a measure designed to leave rural workers outside the arbitration system would be introduced.[31] When it came before the Assembly in November, it was quickly passed, one Country Party member pointing out that rural labour costs had to be cut if farmers were to compete on the world market.[32]

In times of economic stability concessions of this kind would have earned the Country Party widespread local gratitude, but, as we have seen, this was a time when declining prices and uncertainty had revived demands for tariff reductions and for compulsory marketing. Even had it occupied an independent position in the Assembly, the N.S.W. Country Party could not have represented such demands effectively, especially in view of its obligations to the federal party, but as a coalition partner it was even less able to do so. Nor could it win F.S.A. approval by repealing the more important of the Lang Ministry's rural labour legislation, such as the Rural Workers Accommodation Act and the Workers Compensation Act. Buttenshaw was driven to complain to the 1929 F.S.A. conference that the removal of 'quite a lot of legislation that we believe to-day is more or less fantastic, [would be] absolutely impossible to carry out; if we had told the people that we are going to remove all these things, I honestly believe we would not have been where we are to-day'.[33] The F.S.A. was also critical of the government's reluctance to repeal a section of the Local Government Act, which had been amended by the Lang Ministry in 1927 to provide for adult franchise in local body elections. The removal of the offending section had been demanded in 1928 by both the Country Party Central Council and by the F.S.A. conference, which asked its executive 'to bring pressure to bear' on Country Party members to have them deal with the matter.[34] However, the Local Government Bill introduced by the government in November 1928 did not provide for the repeal of the disputed section, and only two Country Party members supported a private member's motion to have a clause to this effect included in the bill.[35]

[30] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1928, p. 50; ibid., 1929, p. 9.

[31] *S.M.H.*, 21 June 1929.

[32] R. S. Vincent, *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 119, 3 Dec. 1929, pp. 1935-40.

[33] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1929, p. 90.

[34] *S.M.H.*, 29 May 1928; N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1928, pp. 114-15.

[35] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol 115, 7 Nov. 1928, pp. 1656-62.

Meanwhile, a revival of the agitation for new states served to underline the fact that the Country Party, even in government, had been unable to fulfil its earlier undertakings to redress the balance between expenditure on city and country. Buttenshaw had to admit in March 1929, for example, that 77 per cent of the public works fund was still being spent on the metropolitan area.[36] Although the Northern New State League's Armidale Convention of April 1929 was stage-managed, it nevertheless revealed that the demand for a New England region was again on the upsurge.[37] It was in the Riverina, however, that the decentralization cry proved most embarrassing to the Country Party. The former Riverina New State League had ceased to exist, but in 1928, amidst sudden enthusiasm, a Riverina Development League was formed at Wagga Wagga and held two successful conventions, the first in May 1928 and the second in May 1929. At this stage its objectives were limited to demands for increased public works development in the Riverina and Southern Tablelands; as early as May 1928 its president gained publicity by claiming that out of a total loan expenditure of £11,764,000 only £250,000 would be spent on Riverina roads and railways as compared with £5,500,000 on works in Sydney.[38] Most Riverina people did not expect the Country Party to produce spectacular results but they did expect it to put pressure on the government to carry through certain concrete schemes, such as the South Western Tableland Water Supply programme, intended to provide water for the towns in the Upper Murrumbidgee Valley at a cost of £1,664,000. By September 1929, however, only £52,000 had been spent on the purchase of pipes, though another £22,000 had been authorized and £200,000 estimated as expenditure for the coming year.[39]

As performance fell behind expectations in this way, the wisdom of the coalition strategy as a means of influencing policy was questioned. In his presidential address to the 1929 F.S.A. conference, H. K. Nock complained that 'practically the whole of the Lang Government's industrial legislation is still on the Statute Book'. He went on to comment more strongly:

> We recognise that in a Composite Government there must be compromise. We admit that the Premier's policy speech tied the hands

[36] Ibid., vol. 117, 19 Mar. 1929, p. 3897.

[37] 'Northern New State Movement. Official Report of Third Convention', Tamworth, 1929. See Ellis, *The Country Party, New South Wales*, pp. 121-2.

[38] *S.M.H.*, 28 May 1928. On the Riverina movement in general see Ellis, op. cit., pp. 122-3, and note 10 of ch. 22 (p. 234). I wish to thank Mr J. A. Lorimer, of Narrandera, for the information he gave me about the Riverina decentralization movements, with which he was closely associated in the twenties.

[39] *N.S.W. P.D.*, vol. 112, 19 Apr. 1928, p. 117; vol. 118, 18 Sept. 1929, p. 105; vol. 119, 10 Dec. 1929, pp. 2270-1.

> of the Government to some extent; but far from entirely, and we claim that action should have been taken to have the Local Government Act (particularly in regard to the franchise clause), and the Workers' Compensation Act amended before now. Throughout the country districts the impression has grown that so far the compromise has been all on one side, and Parliamentary members should note that fence jumping for expediency does not appeal beyond the County of Cumberland.[40]

Buttenshaw later appealed to the delegates for greater tolerance:

> I honestly believe that the men you send into Parliament should have just a little bit of latitude to give and take in connection with any of the promises they have made, because very often what might be a reasonable proposal to-day is absolutely impossible in 12 or 18 months' time. So I feel we will have to give you a policy, but that we must be permitted, in certain instances, to vary the policy.[41]

But the conference indicated its disagreement by adopting a resolution condemning electoral pacts and declaring that the leaders of the State and Federal Country Parties should 'consult the elected members of their party and the Executive of the Country Party, before entering into any arrangement with any other party as to the manner of conducting an election campaign'.[42]

On the other hand, the Graziers' Association remained firmly in favour of the alliance between the National and Country Parties, as C. G. Waddell and F. H. Tout made clear in their presidential addresses to the 1928 and 1929 conferences respectively.[43] In 1930, when the question of forming another electoral alliance came before the Country Party Central Council, the F.S.A.'s representatives spoke out in favour of the Country Party's being more aggressive in contesting country seats, but the weight of opinion was against them and another restrictive pact was arranged.[44] Then, at the election of 25 October 1930, Labor was returned to power with 55 seats in the 90-member Assembly, while the National Party was cut back to 23 members and the Country Party to 12. Although the latter had lost only one seat, its majorities had been seriously reduced and, to quote a special report made by Trethowan, it had 'lost a certain amount of support through the wheat belt'.[45]

[40] N.S.W. F.S.A. *Conference Report*, 1929, pp. 19-20.

[41] Ibid., p. 90.

[42] Ibid., pp. 88-9.

[43] *N.S.W. Graziers' Annual, 1928*, p. 15; *1929*, p. 35.

[44] *Country Party Central Council Minutes*, vol. 5, 13 Nov. 1929; 26 Feb., 23 Apr. 1930.

[45] Ibid., Report by A. K. Trethowan, 1 Nov. 1930. The party's total vote actually rose on this occasion, but only because it contested 21 seats as against

(Continued on facing page)

The New South Wales Country Party was learning to survive. Its experiments in strategy had cost it support and status but it had managed to hold together as a parliamentary group and to retain, in a large measure, the loyalty of organizations as contrasting as the F.S.A. and the Graziers' Association. It was already testing the suitability of the bank-order system as a means of financing a branch network separate from those of the two producers' associations, and its parliamentary members were gaining confidence in their ability to maintain the strength of their local support. These were the positive assets on which Bruxner, who was soon to resume the party leadership, was to base his new offensive against Langism in the countryside.

Western Australia: The Problem of Remaining a Separate Opposition

The Labor government formed by Philip Collier in Western Australia in April 1924 held power for six years, surviving the election of 26 March 1927 without difficulty, for it took the non-Labor parties several years to recover from the disarray into which they had been thrown by the Country Party split of December 1923. The Primary Producers' Association (P.P.A.) experienced considerable difficulty in rebuilding its parliamentary Country Party while at the same time resisting attempts to have it reabsorbed in a unified non-Labor party. Nevertheless, it did recognize the need to form a comprehensive electoral alliance and to accept the coalition strategy, as applied in the eastern States.

By weakening the conservative wing of the party, the 1923 split had increased the power of the P.P.A.'s radicals, who argued at the 1924 conference of the Association that the Country Party should in future refrain from joining coalition governments. They objected principally to a proposed amendment to the Association's rules, a new clause 53

---

15 in 1927. The electoral boundaries were changed between the two polls but where the results are comparable (e.g. in the Central West) the party's share of the votes declined, from 52·37 to 42·03 per cent in Castlereagh, from 49·66 to 40·78 per cent in Cootamundra, and from 60·59 to 56·69 in Lachlan, for example.

For a detailed analysis of the party's electoral standing in the thirties, see D. A. Aitkin, 'The United Country Party in New South Wales, 1932-1941. A Study of Electoral Support', M.A. Thesis, University of New England, 1960. Aitkin draws attention to the fact that, as country towns became a larger component of Country Party electorates, so it became necessary for the party to broaden its social basis. On this question, see also his 'Voting Trends in Country Electorates', Paper given at the Third A.P.S.A. Conference, Sydney, 1961.

In his Ph.D. thesis, cited above (see note 21), Aitkin has produced an exhaustive study of the New South Wales Country Party's organization in the period after 1946, in which the party bureaucracy played an important role in sustaining rank-and-file interest and activity.

which stipulated that a joint meeting of the P.P.A. Executive and the parliamentary Country Party could approve a coalition agreement.[46] The parliamentary leader, A. Thomson, put forward the case for the amendment by saying that:

> An occasion might arise when in the interests of stable government of this State, and, still more important, in the inetrests [*sic*] of members of this organisation, it would be necessary to form a coalition. . . . the Country Party handed itself over to Sir James Mitchell to be dealt with as he pleased. In future we shall have the safeguard that the other party to the coalition will not have the right to select our Ministers. Had we elected the Country Party Ministers in the late Government, the results would have been very different. . . . If ever there is another coalition, it will be a coalition in the true sense of the term.[47]

However, the radicals remained opposed to coalitions, even 'true' ones, and the executive was finally obliged to alter the proposed clause so that it laid down that no coalition or composite ministry could be arranged without the consent of a special P.P.A. conference.[48]

By 1926 sufficient conservatives had rejoined the Association to permit a return to the coalition strategy. After a long debate, the P.P.A. conference of that year endorsed an electoral alliance with the United Party, both parties agreeing to exchange preferences and to work together under the guidance of a Joint Campaign Board of Advice.[49] No thorough-going attempt was made to prevent United and Country Party candidates standing in the same seats, and an overlapping of candidacies occurred in ten of the twenty-one agricultural electorates in the election of 26 March 1927. There is every indication, however, that the Association's main interest in accepting the pact was the financial assistance it received from the Consultative Council of Perth, a body similar to the Sydney committee of the same name. The Association's President, M. T. Padbury, explained to the 1926 conference that the Council consisted of

> businessmen and financial men who are sick and tired of the way things have been going on lately, and who are prepared to find a good deal of money provided a working arrangement can be brought about. Many thousands of pounds have been collected to help us in our work, and but for the arrangement that money would not have been subscribed. . . . We used to look upon these men as our enemies. They were keeping a good many producers going, and thereby grew

[46] P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1924, p. 41.

[47] Ibid., p. 43.

[48] Ibid., pp. 41-9.

[49] Ibid., 1926, p. 29. See also *West Australian*, 12 Jan. 1927; *Primary Producer*, 3 Mar. 1927.

> fat while the other men got pretty white. We can deal with those people only through the co-operative movement. However, they have big interests in the State and are prepared to assist those who are against the Bolshevist movement.[50]

At a meeting of non-Labor candidates in February 1927, S. J. McGibbon, chairman of the Consultative Council, announced that his organization was engaged in collecting £7,000 to finance the joint election campaign. He claimed that the Council's members represented:

> a cross-section of the community, inasmuch as all classes of businesses and professions were represented, and any advice they might give would represent, therefore, some sort of collective wisdom. The only hope for the country lay in an anti-socialistic Government. If the Labour Government came back stronger they would bring forward again the same proposals. He agreed that the United Party had one window to look out of and the Country Party another, but they both read out of the same Bible, and the council only asked them to read the same chapter at the same time so far as this election was concerned.[51]

Even so, the outcome was disappointing; notwithstanding the financial assistance of the Consultative Council and a free run in all country seats, the Country Party was still unable to recover the ground it had lost as a result of the 1923 split, and the Labor government was returned to power with 27 seats out of 50, the United Party winning 16, and the Country Party 7. During the 1927-30 Parliament the Country Party managed to attract back three members, C. G. Latham and S. Stubbs in November 1927[52] and C. C. Maley in March 1929,[53] thereby making its membership ten as against the United Party's thirteen.

However, the differences within the party prevented it from making much headway. In the late twenties the executive and the parliamentary party were united in opposing the Association's radicals who were influenced by the 'revivalism' which characterized the Country Progressive movement in Victoria. The radicals looked to Percy Stewart as their leader in the Federal Country Party, subscribed to the conditional-support strategy (arguing in the Western Australian context that the Collier Labor Ministry was sufficiently moderate to warrant Country Party support), and opposed proposals made at successive P.P.A. conferences that the Country Party should accept coalitions and electoral pacts with the United Party. They lacked the regional basis or the numerical strength of the Victorian radicals and, during the depression, put all their energies into the radical Wheat-

[50] P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1926, p. 51.

[51] *West Australian*, 4 Feb. 1927.

[52] Ibid., 4 Nov., 15 Dec. 1927.

[53] Ibid., 23 Mar. 1929.

growers' Union.[54] The Labor government was defeated at the election of 12 April 1930, after which Sir James Mitchell formed another non-Labor coalition, in which the Country Party ministers were C. G. Latham (Lands, Immigration and Health), J. Lindsay (Public Works and Labour), C. F. Baxter, M.L.C. (Country Water Supplies and Trading Concerns), and P. D. Ferguson (Agriculture).

Although its long period in opposition had meant that the Western Australian Country Party had been unable to exercise a direct influence on government policy, it had had an opportunity to re-establish its relations with the United Party, and to build up its branch membership by means of the bank-order system, a method of recruitment which it pioneered.[55] But while its partial recovery in this period appears to run counter to the trend in other States, where the movement was generally declining, it is important to note that even after the 1930 election, in which it won ten seats, the Western Australian Country Party had still not regained its 1921 strength of sixteen seats nor its 1923 peak of eighteen members. Moreover, although it had begun as a separate party, it was by 1926 financially and politically dependent on the Consultative Council of Perth and hence on the leadership of the United Party. Even more than in the case of the New South Wales party, it was by acceptance of the coalition strategy that the Western Australian Country Party avoided the total decline which its financial and organizational inadequacy might otherwise have produced.

The Federal Country Party and the Bruce-Page Coalition, 1926-1929

Dr Earle Page and his colleagues were always at pains to prove that the Bruce-Page government had produced endless benefits for rural interests, benefits which could be traced directly to the influence of the Federal Country Party. In October 1929, for example, the president of the Victorian Country Party said that the names of W. C. Hill, Thomas Paterson, and W. G. Gibson, the Commonwealth (and Country Party) Ministers for Works and Railways, Markets and Transport, and Postmaster-General respectively, were 'synonymous with better main roads, higher returns for dairy produce, and the world's best postal and telephone facilities throughout Australia'.[56] The

[54] The P.P.A. conference debates on political strategy were held in closed session in 1925, 1927, 1928 and 1929, and my information about the radical protest was supplied by Mr H. J. Prater, who was General Secretary of the P.P.A. from 1925, in an interview at Perth on 13 Nov. 1956. For a partial exposition of the radical viewpoint, see the speech by McKinley, P.P.A. *Conference Report*, 1926, pp. 49-50.

[55] P.P.A. membership rose from 1,700 in 1925 to 2,860 (2,742 of whom had taken out bank orders) in January 1927 (ibid., p. 27; *Primary Producer*, 27 Jan. 1927).

[56] *Argus*, 11 Oct. 1929.

Country Party claimed credit for the maintenance of the embargo on sugar imports, the formation of the Canned Fruits Export Board, and the authorization of a bounty on cotton seed grown in Australia. It took pride in the fact that, under the Export Guarantee Act, 1924-5, financial assistance had been granted to the Doradilla grape, Tasmanian hops, and citrus fruit industries amongst others, and that the Rural Credits Department of the Commonwealth Bank had provided liberal loans to co-operative organizations handling primary produce.[57] One of its ministers, Paterson, had fostered the dairy-marketing scheme named after him, by which butter exports were subsidized by a levy on local sales.

However, there were many fields of policy in which the federal party, either out of deference to the National Party or on grounds of principle, was unable or unwilling to represent farmers' demands; the campaigns for tariff reductions, a compulsory wheat pool, and the sale of the Commonwealth Shipping Line are cases in point. Since its formation in 1917, the shipping line had run at a loss but may well have served to keep shipping freights down at a time when a shortage of merchant vessels had increased the bargaining power of the wealthy shipping interests. Conservative opinion in the twenties, however, insisted that a public utility should be judged by its ability to pay its way rather than by its value to industry or to the community. In 1927 a Public Accounts Committee recommended, in a majority report signed by three Country Party members amongst others, that the Shipping Line should be sold in view of the heavy losses incurred in its running expenses,[58] a recommendation accepted by the government. In the parliamentary discussions, the non-Labor critics of the proposal were Hughes, who used confidential documents to show that in the past the Line had prevented British shippers from raising freights,[59] and Percy Stewart, who also claimed that freight charges would be raised if the Line was sold.[60] In spite of this, in April 1928 the Line was sold to a subsidiary of the White Star Line controlled by Lord Kylsant, and just eight months later, in January 1929, British shipowners gave notice that they intended to raise their freights on goods carried from the United Kingdom to Australia by 10 per cent. The Commonwealth government tried to persuade them not to do so, but without avail,[61] a lesson not lost upon the farmers.

A further field in which the Country Party failed to produce tangible changes, and one which caused it some embarrassment, was in

[57] See *C.P.D.*, vol. 119, 20 Sept. 1928, p. 7010.

[58] 'Joint Committee of Public Accounts, Report on the Commonwealth Government Shipping Activities', *C.P.P.*, 1926-8, vol. IV, pp. 5-35.

[59] *C.P.D.*, vol. 116, 9 Nov. 1927, pp. 1111-21. See also *S.M.H.*, 11 Nov. 1927.

[60] *C.P.D.*, vol. 116, 10 Nov. 1927, pp. 1199-204.

[61] See *Argus*, 25 Apr. 1928; 4, 17 Jan., 12 Apr., 9 May 1929. For background, see W. Farmer Whyte, *William Morris Hughes. His Life and Times*, p. 461.

the new states movement. Victor Thompson, a Country Party member and the secretary of the Northern New State League, had moved during the 1926 session of the Commonwealth Parliament that the Constitution should be amended to provide the federal government with the power to create new states without the consent of the State governments concerned, but at the instance of another Country Party member, C. L. A. Abbott, the House resolved that the question should be referred to a special constitutional session—which was never held.[62] In July 1927, however, the Commonwealth government appointed a royal commission to report on the working of the Constitution since federation, and to investigate several related topics such as the powers of the federal ministry with regard to the creation of new states. The Peden Commission, as it was called, made its findings public in September 1929, recommending in a majority report that, if so petitioned by one-fifth of the electors in the proposed area, the Commonwealth government be given the sole power to decide on the creation of new states after referring the proposal by referendum to the electors in the old State.[63] However, the Bruce-Page government had no opportunity to deal with these recommendations before its defeat.

The protracted hearings of the Peden Commission absolved the Country Party from the obligation to raise the new states issue again in the federal Parliament, and it made no serious attempt to do so. A convention of the Northern New State League was held at Armidale in April 1929, but it was marked by a great deal less separatist enthusiasm than formerly—one of the party's most important ideological assets was on the wane. When the Bruce-Page coalition was defeated at the snap election of 12 October 1929, therefore, critics of the Country Party rightly assumed that it would wait a barely decent interval before reviving its free-trade and new-states slogans. As Percy Stewart said in a letter to Hughes, 'No doubt Page will bring out his New State hobby horse and mount him again. He has had a long spell.'[64]

However, in spite of the relatively few concessions made to rural pressure groups, particularly in respect of trade and marketing policy, Page was not greatly harassed by these groups. This was largely because he had brought about a reorganization of the party's federal structure in 1926. Before that year, the federal agency connected with his party had been the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation (A.F.F.O.), which had proved difficult to control during the discussions over the federal election pact in 1924 and during the critical pre-election session of 1925. In March 1925, for example, an A.F.F.O.

[62] Geoffrey Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1901-1929*, p. 288; Ellis, *History of the Australian Country Party*, pp. 152-3.

[63] R. S. Parker, 'Why New States?', in *New States for Australia*, p. 4.

[64] Letter, P. G. Stewart to W. M. Hughes, 30 Oct. 1929 (Hughes Papers).

conference had declared for the abolition of tariff duties on imported agricultural machinery and farm requisites, for the removal of the dumping duty on wire netting, and for the establishment of a compulsory wheat pool, all requests which the Country Party felt unable to support.[65] Demands so embarrassing became much less possible when the A.F.F.O. was replaced in 1926 by the Australian Country Party Association (A.C.P.A.). Its constitution and basic policies were worked out at a conference on 23 and 24 March 1926, when the various reasons for bringing it into existence were stated openly. The principal one appears to have been the need to provide an institution which would represent political rather than economic demands, to recognize the fact that the country party movement was no longer simply a federation of pressure groups (the assumption underlying the A.F.F.O.) but an association of parties whose social basis was broadening to include country townsmen and other social groups who could not be assimilated into the general category of 'farmers and graziers'.[66] When interviewed in 1956, Sir Earle Page placed amongst his motives in establishing the A.C.P.A. the desire to create an institutional situation in which the application of policy (which he distinguished from the formulation of policy) and matters of parliamentary strategy and tactics (questions which he maintained were best judged by the party's federal parliamentarians) should be left to the Federal Country Party. On the other hand, he denied that the close attention paid by the A.F.F.O. to tariff and marketing problems had inconvenienced his party.[67]

Whether 'political' or 'economic', the A.C.P.A. proved itself a much less effective federal agency than the A.F.F.O. Its constitution[68] provided for a Central Council of seventeen members, consisting of the leader and two other representatives of the Federal Country Party and fourteen members elected annually by the affiliated organizations. In fact, however, the dominance of the federal parliamentarians was assured for several reasons; firstly, because there was no Tasmanian association to appoint the two delegates allotted to the State; secondly, because almost all the organizations, and especially those in Western Australia and South Australia, were accustomed to appointing federal members to represent them on such meetings; thirdly, because only eight delegates were required to constitute a quorum, irrespective of the number of organizations represented; fourthly, because the Council, which was required to meet annually, could appoint an Executive

[65] *Argus*, 25 Mar. 1925; *Countryman* (Melb.), 27 Mar. 1925.

[66] *Minute Book of the Australian Country Party Association*, 1926-43 (held at the office of the Australian Country Party (N.S.W.), 7 Phillip Street, Sydney), 23, 24 Mar. 1926. See Ellis, *History of the Australian Country Party*, pp. 141-5; Sir Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp. 174-5.

[67] Interviews, Canberra, 22 Feb., 7 Mar. 1956.

[68] Drafted in 1926 and approved in 1927—*The Australian Country Party Association, Constitution and Platform*, Sydney, 1927.

Committee which required only three members for a quorum. While the work of selecting candidates and running the local campaigns was specifically reserved for the State organizations, the A.C.P.A. Council was authorized to direct and supervise organizational and propaganda work in co-operation with them and to frame or amend 'the policy based on the platform of the Party in consultation with the Federal Parliamentary Party'. This meant that the A.C.P.A. would not be entitled to make policy statements without the approval of the Federal Country Party, as the A.F.F.O. had done, for instance, in January 1924.[69]

In fact, the A.C.P.A. failed to use effectively even these limited powers. Whereas six conferences of the A.F.F.O. had been held between 1923 and 1925, an average of two a year,[70] only four A.C.P.A. conferences (one of which was perfunctory) were held between 1926 and 1929, an average of one a year.[71] Whereas the officials of the State organizations had been in a majority at A.F.F.O. conferences, members of the federal party predominated at those of the A.C.P.A., this shift in power being emphasized further by the appointment of Page as A.C.P.A. President in 1927. Whereas the A.F.F.O. had been outspoken about the need for tariff reductions and compulsory marketing, A.C.P.A. discussions of these issues were cautious and indefinite, mainly because members of the Federal Country Party, mindful of the coalition agreement, insisted on the need for compromise. In the meantime the A.F.F.O., which was registered as an industrial union of employers under the Federal Arbitration Court,[72] carried on with greatly reduced powers.

As federal leader, Page was anxious to maintain informal and personal contacts with the State associations and took advantage of the fact that all the members of the Federal Country Party had important and complementary sources of influence. W. W. Killen (Riverina) was a member of the F.S.A. Executive, of the Country Party Central Council in New South Wales, and a director of the newspaper, *Land*; C. L. A. Abbott (Gwydir) was a member of the General Council of the Graziers' Association, and of the executive of the Northern New State League; V. C. Thompson (New England) was secretary of the latter organization and editor of the *Tamworth Daily Leader*; Senator J. H. Chapman (South Australia) was a member of the executive of the Country Party Association and the director of Country News Ltd; J. H. Prowse (Forrest), Henry Gregory (Swan), and Senator William Carroll were in close touch with the Western

[69] *Argus*, 25-6 Jan. 1924.

[70] 26-7 Feb., 30 Apr. 1923; 24-5 Jan., 17-18 June, 19-21 July 1924; 24 Mar. 1925.

[71] 30 Sept. 1926; 6 May 1927 (limited attendance); 1 June 1927; 12 Mar. 1928.

[72] *S.M.H.*, 23 Oct. 1926.

Australian P.P.A.; and two Victorian federal members were elected each year to positions on the V.C.P. Central Council, the representatives for 1929-30 being W. C. Hill (Echuca) and Thomas Paterson (Gippsland). These men were able to keep Page informed about what was happening at the State level of the movement, but even so the federal leader would use each parliamentary recess to see things for himself. The 'Doc' travelled thousands of miles in the twenties, and country newspapers and farm journals of this time contain hundreds of photographs of him addressing meetings, talking to farmers, admiring cattle at a show, or parting a sheep's fleece for the cameraman. No other person in the party was as widely known and respected, and he demanded—and obtained—that unquestioning loyalty which Australian farmers are accustomed to give their leaders.

As his confidence increased, Page intervened more directly in the affairs of the State parties. His influence was always in favour of the coalition strategy, involving electoral understandings with the National Parties, while in the organizational field he stressed the need to establish a branch network independent of those of the 'industrial organizations', as he called rural pressure groups such as the V.F.U. and the New South Wales F.S.A. 'Political' rather than 'industrial' branches were, he considered, more likely to recruit country townsmen, whose active support the party needed, and to moderate the economic demands which the farmers' associations had insisted on making in the early days of the movement. Except in Victoria, where Allan and his colleagues never quite succeeded in bringing the Mallee men under control, Page's task as leader was made much easier in the late twenties by the fact that conservative oligarchies established themselves in the State party organizations, stifling those remnants of delegate democracy which had survived from the movement's formative years.

Within the federal coalition alliance, the Country Party found its status being slowly eroded. Its share of cabinet places, for example, fell from five to four out of twelve after the reshuffle of 18 June 1926, and to four out of thirteen after 29 November 1928. In his autobiography, Page claims that Bruce came under pressure from some of the Nationalists to end the coalition after the 1925 election and that, although he would not contemplate such drastic action, he persuaded Page to agree to increased National Party representation in the cabinet.

> As a result of our three years' partnership we had found in fact, that no Cabinet decision was ever reached on a purely party division. I was consequently not as worried then as I was in 1923 about the theory of party equality in a composite Government.[73]

In terms of portfolios, moreover, the Country Party held its own. Page remained Treasurer until 1929, and was Acting Prime Minister

[73] Sir Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 173.

during Bruce's visit to the Imperial Conference of 1926; W. G. Gibson remained Postmaster-General throughout the life of the government; when W. C. Hill was dropped from the cabinet in November 1928 his portfolio, Works and Railways, was transferred to Gibson; Thomas Paterson succeeded Senator V. Wilson as Minister for Markets and Migration in June 1926, the post being renamed Markets and Transport on 29 November 1928, at the same time as C. L. A. Abbott became Minister for Home Affairs. It has been suggested to the writer that Bruce selected Abbott in preference to J. A. J. Hunter or V. C. Thompson, whom Page is said to have favoured. Thompson protested that Hill should not have been replaced by Abbott without reference to the party, but a meeting of the party refused to take any action.[74] If Bruce had in fact selected Abbott, he had ignored one of the terms of the 1923 agreement by which Page had been conceded the right to choose the Country Party ministers.

Until the 1929 election, the parliamentary party kept up its nominal strength. Its members numbered fourteen just after the 1925 election, but about June 1926 it lost L. Atkinson (Wilmot) to the National Party and in July of the same year Percy Stewart declared himself independent.[75] In September 1928, however, it was joined by the Queensland member, B. H. Corser, who had just been returned in the Wide Bay by-election, bringing its strength to thirteen. Then it lost Indi in the election of 17 November 1928 (because the sitting member failed to lodge his nomination paper in time) but won Wakefield in South Australia.

By this stage, however, much of the country party movement's early vitality had drained away, and had the federal party dared to wage an independent election campaign, it would probably have lost about five seats. The electoral pact, renewed at the beginning of 1928 and applied to the elections of 17 November 1928 and 12 October 1929, undoubtedly assisted it in maintaining its previous strength. Though the terms, announced by Bruce and Page on 8 January 1928,[76] contained the usual provisions, they did not, significantly, contain certain features of the 1924 agreement, which had excluded Tasmania altogether, had excepted Bendigo, Corio, Gippsland, Riverina and Richmond from the immunity provisions, and had proposed joint ministerial teams for the Senate elections. Although there was nothing like the protest made by the farmers' organizations in 1924, some of these groups objected to the terms of the agreement,[77] and an A.C.P.A. conference of 12 March 1928, at which the New South Wales delegates complained that the pact was restricting the party's growth, endorsed

[74] *S.M.H.*, 30 Nov., 1 Dec. 1928; *Argus*, 5, 15 Dec. 1928; 6 Feb. 1929.

[75] Ibid., 23 July 1926. He later associated himself with the Victorian Country Progressive Party.

[76] Ibid., 9 Jan. 1928.

[77] Ellis, *History of the Australian Country Party*, pp. 147-8.

it only on condition that the provision for joint Senate teams be restored and that candidates of both non-Labor parties should be entitled to contest by-elections for seats formerly held by a ministerialist, no matter to which party he had belonged.[78] Bruce accepted these changes when they were referred to him by Page.[79]

Within the Nationalist Party, hostility towards the coalition agreement was growing steadily. By 1927 one Nationalist member felt bold enough to assert that the Country Party was over-represented in the cabinet and that the electoral pact should not be renewed,[80] and soon after this, W. M. Hughes judged that sufficient feeling had been built up against the Country Party to enable him to move against the government and against Page, whom he had not forgiven for deposing him in 1923. 'This combination must go if Nationalism is to be saved', he wrote to R. W. Foster, a member of his former cabinet, at the end of 1928. 'I will make my friends Janus and company sit up.' When this letter was released to the press, Hughes revealed that at National Party meetings he had frequently urged Bruce to end the coalition and form a straight Nationalist ministry.[81] Though it would have been difficult to foment a revolt against the government during the 1926-8 Parliament, in which it had a solid majority, the election of 17 November 1928 produced a much more even position in the House of Representatives—National 29, Country Party 13, Labor 31, and Independents 2. Hughes mustered sufficient followers, including Percy Stewart, to harass the government during the 1929 sessions, and his group voted with the Labor Party on 10 September 1929 to defeat it on an amendment to the Maritime Industries Bill, a piece of legislation which aimed at abolishing the system of federal arbitration, except in the case of the coastal shipping industry, and restoring the power of arbitration to the States. There is evidence which suggests that Hughes had planned to form a stop-gap ministry, but Bruce forestalled any such move by obtaining a dissolution. The government parties were defeated in the following election, held on 12 October 1929, and J. H. Scullin was able to form a Labor government.[82] Had he not done so, there is a possibility that Hughes might have engineered a palace revolution within the National Party and then tried to sever its connection with the Country Party. Even had the ministry survived the 1929 election, a crisis in the coalition alliance could only have been a matter of time. Defeat in 1929 was something in the nature of a reprieve for the Country Party.

[78] *Minute Book of the Australian Country Party Association*, 1926-43, 12 Mar. 1928.

[79] *Advertiser*, 9 Nov. 1928.

[80] *Argus*, 6 May 1927.

[81] Ibid., 16 Sept. 1929.

[82] For a definitive account of these events see Dagmar Carboch, 'The Fall of the Bruce-Page Government', *Studies in Australian Politics*.

As Hughes represented one threat to the Country Party's alliance with the Nationalists, Stewart represented another. Stewart was the sole federal representative of the Victorian Country Progressive Party, whose conferences had declared for tariff reductions, federal guarantees and compulsory pooling in wheat marketing, and had opposed both the sale of the Commonwealth Shipping Line and, in 1929, the proposed abolition of the federal arbitration system.[83] Stewart, who was to die in October 1931, clearly did not see himself as a perpetual rebel and probably hoped that once Page had agreed to abandon the coalition strategy he would be able to rejoin a more militant, more radical Country Party. Yet while political circumstances required him to act out his role as the lonely champion of the Mallee farmer, his protest was mainly one about strategy, and one which reflected his regret that the Country Party had lacked the courage of its former convictions. For him, the coalition agreement had been a surrender to constitutional orthodoxy and conservatism. In 1925 he had declared:

> Parliamentary systems, like all human systems, must and will change. The present parliamentary procedure is the result of centuries of evolution, and is totally unsuited to a young democratic country like Australia.[84]

But this was a cry from the Country Party's early radicalism—the future lay with men such as Earle Page, Michael Bruxner, Thomas Paterson and William Gibson, who prided themselves on being good administrators and conventional politicians. The Country Party had come to town.

[83] *Argus*, 17, 20 Sept. 1927; 11 Feb., 10 Oct. 1928; 21, 24 Sept. 1929.
[84] *C.P.D.*, vol. 110, 9 July 1925, pp. 870-1.

9

Conclusion

The small farming communities of Australia and North America differed from the traditional peasant communities of western Europe in several respects. Whereas the peasants had not much choice in accepting low social status and a meagre income, the farmers of the new lands saw themselves as people of consequence and standing. Whereas peasant communities were usually tightly structured and convention bound, the agrarian communities of the new world were fluid and open, a contrast symbolized by the close-knit village on the one hand and the pattern of scattered homesteads on the other. Whereas peasant discontent generally lacked form and gave rise to aimless *jacqueries* which died down as quickly as they arose, the protests of the colonial farmers were well-organized and confident. Such contrasts cannot be drawn too sharply, however, especially in view of the fact that the peasantry of France and Germany and the small farmers of Great Britain were, by the end of the nineteenth century, developing a wide range of political skills. However, whereas in the old world agrarian movements were usually brought under control by a complicated system of checks and balances, in the new world the farmers were dealing with a political structure which was still relatively flexible, and their organizations had much greater scope for protest and pressure.

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, when the new farmers of the United States and Canada were being drawn into such movements as the Greenback agitation or the Populist revolt, Australian farmers were not playing an active, separate role in politics. The North American crusades against proprietary railway companies, grain elevator firms, and the great grain exchanges, had only faint echoes in Australia where the state built railways, the grain trade was disorganized, and most agricultural production was for home consumption. Nevertheless, the Australian growers did have to fight hard for their land, and had to farm it despite bad weather conditions, a shortage of capital, and the vagaries of the local market. They were the victims of sufficient petty injustices at the hands of storekeepers, traders and bankers to develop a sectional conciousness which had become a political fact well before the outbreak of World War I. In a society where political action was often the action of section and

interest, the wheat farmers formed a coherent group, and the early country parties were in many ways the inheritors of the political separatism of the early agricultural communities of the Riverina, the Wimmera, and similar regions.

It is perhaps surprising, in view of what we have just noted, that the agrarian tradition which flowed into the Australian country parties was more bitter than those which gave rise to farmers' parties in the American Mid-West and the Canadian prairies. The Australian farmer's frontier was economic rather than geographical; he had to grow wheat on land where the squatter and the pastoral worker were the masters, where his inferior status was summed up in his nickname, the 'Cocky', a man who scratched for a living, endured squalid conditions, ate bad food, stayed in one place, and over-worked his wife and children. Resentment, and a suggestion of violence, flickers beneath the surface of agrarian politics in the eighties and nineties. Like those of North America, Australian agrarian myths emphasized the exploitation of the country by the city, the importance of the rural community as the source of virtue and virility for the wider society, and the nobility of life close to nature, but there was a significant difference in temper between the two.

As the rapid rise and fall of the American movements would suggest, something of the old *jacquerie* pattern persisted in the agrarian protest movements of the new world. There was not the rioting and the aimless violence, but there was the sudden surge of enthusiasm, the romanticism, the outburst of energy, followed by an equally sudden subsidence of feeling. The task of leadership in this situation was not so much to arouse enthusiasm as to give it institutional form, and to maintain something of that form after the enthusiasm had ebbed away, to provide continuous pressure in place of an intermittent show of force. Similar though less intense waves of enthusiasm appear to have swept through rural Australia in the late nineteenth century —after the gold rushes, in the late seventies, the early nineties, and just after the turn of the century. Each gave rise to characteristic institutions but these tended to fade away once their initial impact had been made. By the second decade of the new century, however, the situation had been changed, for there was now sufficient organizational experience in the rural communities to ensure that such opportunities would no longer be lost. Decades of trial and error in the running of local farmers' clubs and associations, the organization of co-operative companies, discussions at annual show gatherings in country towns and the main cities, the confidence gained in lay church work and in running lodges such as the Masonic and the Orange, the lessons of early trade union and Labour Party techniques—all these forms of organizational experience had produced a number of rural leaders who understood how to hold the scattered homesteads together in pursuit of political objectives. The wave of enthusiasm which arose in the decade 1910-20 gave them the chance for which they had been

waiting; they used it to elect farmers' candidates to Parliament, and to form them into country parties.

The discontent which the country parties expressed had been aroused largely by the intrusion of the state into areas of the rural economy which had not previously been regulated. Before about 1910, rural pressure groups were mainly concerned with influencing those government departments which administered the land laws, roads and railways, customs duties, and so on. In most cases the relations between department and pressure group had been flexible and creative; in cases where the usual representations failed to produce results, all that the farmers' organization had to do was to prod the local members of Parliament into action, arrange a deputation to the minister, or possibly form a country faction within an existing party. In other words, after the era of the great land reforms agrarian politics were concerned mainly with the adjustment and implementation of existing legislation. Between 1910 and 1920, however, this equilibrium was seriously disturbed; when the Commonwealth and several State Labor governments were formed in 1910 and 1911 farmers began to fear that their Departments of Lands would become the agents of further change, either by instituting a general leasehold tenure or by nationalizing the land altogether, and that the system of industrial arbitration would be extended to take in agricultural as well as pastoral and urban labour. During the war, the marketing controls created a completely new, and necessarily authoritarian bureaucracy in a hitherto untouched field; each rural group made a determined effort to enter and control the new produce pools and, in the case of the wheat farmers, even raised the demand that they should be continued after the war. With the new marketing organizations went a thicket of price controls, administered under the Commonwealth War Precautions Act; graziers and dairy farmers particularly resented this régime, and the graziers marked their displeasure by demonstrating against the meat-price fixing regulations in 1918. As more and more of the rural industries were drawn into export trading, so their sensitivity to the administration of the protective tariff system increased; some wanted the level of tariffs provided by the Lyne settlement of 1908 reduced, others hoped to have the duties removed from certain categories of imports, such as agricultural machinery, wire netting, sprays, and fertilizer ingredients, but all felt powerless to influence the system by the usual pressure-group methods. And then in 1919 came reports that the Hughes government intended to provide a new measure of protection.

Their determination to resist such extensions of state activity prompted farmers' and graziers' groups to oppose the 'powers' referenda of 1911, 1913 and 1919, and to support the country parties. The anti-parliamentary, almost anti-liberal strand in early country party thinking was one aspect of a general rural determination to set limits to state authority except, of course, where that authority would serve rural interests, as in forming producer-controlled marketing corpora-

tions or land banks. This paradoxical attitude to state action did not impose great strains on the new parties, simply because they were so lacking in doctrine. While most of the Progressive Party leaders in Canada were also doctrinaires, Australian country party leaders as a whole developed no consistent political philosophy.

No one can deny the enthusiasm of the country party movement at the period of its electoral breakthrough in 1919 and 1920, but that breakthrough was probably as much a result of the weakness of the established political order as of the offensive power of the new parties. An intruder in a stable party situation may be dealt with in a number of ways, depending on whether its strength is regional or general, and depending on the number and importance of its demands; the existing parties can either meet it outright and try to prevent an electoral breakthrough, or one of them can absorb the newcomer by taking over its policies and its clientèle. The Country Parties when first formed were highly vulnerable; they were regionally based, they often suffered from a shortage of money, and they lacked leaders with parliamentary as distinct from electoral experience. They were most fortunate, therefore, that their electoral bid was made at a time when the Australian party system was unstable. After 1916 the Australian Labor Party, except in Queensland, was faced with the problem of making good the loss of strength it had suffered during the split over the conscription issue, and the National Party, formed in 1917, was a precarious sectional alliance of free traders and protectionists, liberals, conservatives and ex-Labor men. Consequently, neither of the two major parties was prepared for the emergence of the country parties, and had to improvise ineffective counter-measures. By the end of 1920, then, country parties had been formed without much difficulty in the parliaments of New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, and the Commonwealth. Where, however, as in South Australia and New Zealand, a country party attempted to establish itself later in the twenties, by which time the older parties had learnt their lesson, it was often contained and squeezed out of existence.

The country parties made the most of their electoral opportunity. They organized with efficiency, chose their candidates with care, and were resourceful in the tasks of forming regional and national institutions, founding newspapers, and deploying their active members to the best advantage. They were aided by the operation of the several alternative voting systems which were then in existence—proportional representation in New South Wales and Tasmania, and preferential voting for elections to the lower Houses of the Western Australian, Victorian, Queensland and Commonwealth Parliaments. These systems removed the fear of vote-splitting which might otherwise have inhibited many farmers from supporting country parties, and worked to their advantage wherever they were regarded as middle groups in the party system by enabling them to attract preference votes from

both sides. But the factor of alternative voting was a marginal one in assisting the emergence of the country parties.

What most distinguished the Australian farmers' parties from the Progressive Parties of Canada and the Non Partisan Leagues of the United States was their ability to survive. The Australian movement declined steadily throughout the twenties but in 1929 it was still sufficiently strong in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia to exploit creatively the agrarian discontent produced by the great depression. On the other hand, the Non Partisan Leagues of the United States did not outlast the failure of La Follette's bid for the presidency in 1924, and in Canada only the United Farmers of Alberta, an organization with exceptional doctrinal integrity, weathered the political doldrums between the war and the depression. Perhaps the main reason for the failure of the Progressive Party in the Canadian Federal Parliament was its isolation, the fact that it was unable either to form an alliance with the Liberal Party or to develop the organizational and doctrinal strength of the Albertan Party. Had the federal party been represented in a coalition government, as tentatively suggested by Mackenzie King in 1921, it might have influenced policy to the satisfaction of its supporters and at the same time obliged the Liberals to guarantee it electoral immunity in certain regions. On the other hand, had it accepted the consequences of its isolation and organized with greater thoroughness, it might have come through the crisis period of 1926 with its numbers relatively intact.

The Australian parties floundered in their first years in Parliament, but under the shrewd leadership of men such as Page, Monger and Bruxner they came to accept the need for parliamentary and electoral alliances wth the Nationalists and for posts in coalition cabinets, thereby ensuring their survival at the parliamentary level as separate though conservative entities. At the electoral level the movement survived because it was firmly grounded in a number of loyal and well-organized regions, which were, in most cases, the regions which had sent the first farmers' members to Parliament. This was made clear on two occasions in particular; in the Victorian State election of 1921 and the federal election of 1922 the Nationalists attacked the Country Party without quarter but gained only a few seats, whereas most factions of the pre-war kind would have been completely obliterated. The electoral pacts of the late twenties were in one respect an admission by the Nationalist leadership that the Country Party had established its right to exist in the party system.

As parties of government, the country parties undoubtedly won some concessions—bounties, special grants, aid for road construction, more telephones—but these, after all, could not completely satisfy men who had helped to establish the parties in the hope that tariffs would be slashed, marketing corporations set up overnight, and the pace of rural development greatly accelerated. Despite their disappointment, however, many people continued to hope that these major

reforms would be achieved in time, and throughout the decade as a whole social groups who imagined that the new political movement stood for revenue tariffism and compulsory produce pools continued to support the country parties. It was not really until the late twenties that they began to have second thoughts.

In general, then, the country parties survived because of their strategic practicality, the solidity of their regional support, and the persistence of the revenue-tariffist and marketing demands which had helped them win a following in the immediate post-war period. At the same time, special factors came into play in each State. In New South Wales, for example, the National Party learnt to accept the Country Party not only because the latter had demonstrated its electoral toughness but because conservative interests felt that the removal of John Lang from power was more important than the promotion of non-Labor unity. In Victoria, the split between the Country and Country Progressive Parties gave the agrarian radicals a means of expression which probably prevented many of them from going over to the Labor Party. Seen in this light, the existence of two country parties in the late twenties may have actually served to maintain the strength of the movement as a whole. In Western Australia, the survival of the Country Party after the serious split of 1923 was made easier by the six years which it spent in opposition, along with the United Party, between 1924 and 1930, years which the P.P.A. used to build up its branch strength and its parliamentary group. On the other hand, had the Mitchell government survived the 1924 election, the Country Party would have found itself relegated to the corner benches without much chance of influencing policy or of repairing its relations with the United Party. Finally, in Commonwealth politics, although Dr Earle Page disappointed the agrarian radicals and those pressure groups which hoped for a great deal from the Bruce-Page Ministry, he not only worked out the coalition strategy, but also gave the party great status amongst country people and established himself as a kind of second, specifically rural, Prime Minister.

Political moralists have rightly chided the country parties for being too sectional in their outlook, too conservative in social policy, and too blatant in their bargaining. But these failings, for all their importance, should be weighed against the fact that, through the early Country Parties, about one-sixth of the Australian people were brought back into a political system from which they had felt excluded. Quite simply, the Country Parties survived because they were needed. Given the undercurrents of anti-liberalism and authoritarianism in Australian society, such reconciliations to the parliamentary system are historically important.

Select Bibliography

The main secondary sources on the history of the Australian Country Parties are the various articles and books written by Ulrich Ellis, whose knowledge of the movement is detailed and intimate. He has published a valuable series of more than one hundred articles, most of which deal with the New South Wales and Federal Country Parties, in the *Countryman* (Sydney), between February 1948 and about 1958. Of his two books, *The Country Party, A Political and Social History of the Party in New South Wales* (Melbourne, 1958), and *A History of the Australian Country Party* (Melbourne, 1963), the second is the most substantial and includes good accounts of the politics of the twenties and thirties.

In his autobiography (*Truant Surgeon, The Inside Story of Forty Years of Australian Political Life*, Sydney, 1963), Sir Earle Page deals mainly with the Federal Country Party's developmental and financial record, but he does throw additional light on the history of the parliamentary Country Party. This book appears to have been a joint enterprise, in which Page and Ellis collaborated in preparing the early drafts and Mrs Ann Mozley edited and condensed the manuscript for publication (see reviews by Massey Stanley and Vince Kelly, *Nation*, Sydney, 23 Feb. 1963, pp. 8-10, and an exchange of letters between Mrs Mozley and Lady Page, *Bulletin*, Sydney, 9 Feb. 1963, p. 36; 16 Feb. 1963, p. 33; 2 Mar. 1963, p. 31). *Truant Surgeon* is most valuable for the insight it provides into Page's view of his career, but it lacks the accuracy of Ellis's *History of the Australian Country Party*.

The following abbreviations have been used to indicate a library holding a rare pamphlet, periodical, or manuscript material:

N.L.	National Library of Australia, Canberra
M.L.	Mitchell Library, Sydney
S.L.V.	State Library of Victoria
O.L.	Oxley Memorial Library, Brisbane
L.S.A.	Public Library of South Australia
W.A.	J. S. Battye Library of Western Australian History, Perth

OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

A list of all the relevant official publications, Commonwealth and State, would be out of all proportion to its usefulness.

Parliamentary Debates and *Votes and Proceedings* are printed for all parliaments except Tasmania, where only *Votes and Proceedings* are available.

The series of *Parliamentary Papers*, under various titles, are an invaluable source, not only for the annual reports of the main government departments, but also for Royal Commissions, special inquiries and the

like. Those for the Commonwealth are often grouped for several years, e.g. 1932-33-34.

Bills Introduced exist for most of the parliaments, and are more useful than the *Statutes* in following proceedings.

The Government Gazette varies in usefulness from State to State, but is generally important for establishing when various measures were proclaimed, the definitive figures of various semi-official ballots (e.g. on marketing proposals), and in some cases (e.g. Western Australia) election results.

The Official Year Books, where they exist, provide useful summaries of existing legislation, statistical data, and administrative policies.

The following handbooks should be noted:

Parliamentary Handbook and Record of Elections for the Commonwealth of Australia, eighth issue, Canberra, 1936.

The New South Wales Parliamentary Record, sixteenth ed., Sydney, 1948.

Victoria: Parliamentary Handbook, Melbourne, 1925.

The Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University, will shortly be publishing a detailed handbook of elections and ministries after 1890.

COUNTRY PARTY RECORDS

A. Printed

N.S.W. F.S.A. Conference Reports, Sydney, 1902 to 1930 (N.L., M.L.)

W.A. F.S.A. Conference Reports, 1913 to 1919 (Farmers' Union Office, 239-43 Adelaide Terrace, Perth)

W.A. P.P.A. Conference Reports, 1920 and 1922 to 1930 (Farmers' Union Office, Perth)

The Pastoralists' Union of New South Wales, Twenty-Sixth Annual Report, 1916, Sydney, 1916 (M.L.)

The Graziers' Association of New South Wales, Twenty-Seventh Annual Report, 1917, Sydney, 1917 (M.L.)

New South Wales Graziers' Annual, Sydney, 1918 to 1930 (M.L.)

B. Manuscript

(i) New South Wales

Minutes of the Political Committee of the Progressive Party, 1915 to 1916 (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), 7 Phillip Street, Sydney)

Minutes of Joint Meetings of the Country Party Central Council and the Parliamentary Progressive Party, 1922 to 1923 (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)

Minutes of Inverell Branch of the F.S.A., 1914 to 1919 (Mt Russell) and 1931 to 1949 (microfilm in N.L.)

Minutes of Tenterfield Branch of the Country Party, 1929 to 1956 and 1930 to 1932 (Country Party Branch Office, Tenterfield)

Minutes of the Progressive Party Central Council (1920 to 1925) and of the Country Party Central Council (1925 to 1930) (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)

Minutes of Graziers' Association Conferences, 1918 to 1930 (Office of Graziers' Association of N.S.W., 56-8 Young Street, Sydney)

(ii) VICTORIA

Minutes of the V.F.U. (later V.C.P.) Central Council, 1916 to 1929 (Country Party Office, 123-5 William Street, Melbourne)

Minutes of the V.F.U. (later V.C.P.) Annual Conferences, 1916 to 1929 (Country Party Office, Melbourne)

(iii) WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Attendance Book of the F.S.A. Executive, 1912 to 1919 (Farmers' Union Office, 239-43 Adelaide Terrace, Perth)

Minutes of the F.S.A. Executive, 1912 to 1916, and 1918 to 1919 (Farmers' Union Office, Perth)

Minutes of the Parliamentary Country Party, 1930 to 1935 and 1938 to 1941 (Office of Parliamentary Country Party, Legislative Assembly, Perth)

(iv) SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Minutes of the Executive of the Liberal Union and the Liberal Federation, 1910 to 1932 (Liberal-Country League Office, Adelaide)

(v) FEDERAL COUNTRY PARTY

Minutes of the Australian Country Party Association, 1926 to 1943 (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), 7 Phillip Street, Sydney)

The Australian Country Party Minute Book, [N.S.W.] 1922 (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)

Page, Rt Hon. E. C. G., 'Speeches', 1922 to 1934 (N.L.)

COUNTRY PARTY CONSTITUTIONS

(i) FEDERAL

Constitution and Rules of the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation, Sydney, 1923 (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), 7 Phillip Street, Sydney)

Constitutions of the Australian Country Party Association, 1927 and 1930 (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)

(ii) NEW SOUTH WALES

The Progressive Party of New South Wales, Constitution and Rules, Sydney, 1920. Also as amended to 1923 (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), 7 Phillip Street, Sydney)

The Country Party of New South Wales, Constitution and Rules, Sydney, 1928, 1929 and 1930 (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)

Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Farmers & Settlers' Association of New South Wales, Sydney, 1921 (Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University)

Rules of the Graziers' Association of New South Wales, Sydney, 1918, 1922, 1925, 1927 and 1929 (Graziers' Association Office, Sydney)

Constitution of the League embraced in the Northern New State Movement (N.S.W.), Tamworth, [1920] (New England New State Movement Office, Armidale)

Constitution of the Riverina New States League, Wagga Wagga, [1921] (Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University)

(iii) VICTORIA

Union of Victorian Farmers, Constitution as arranged by the provisional central council, No. 1A, Melbourne, [1914]

Victorian Farmers' Union, Constitution and Rules, Melbourne, [1917], [1918], 1920, 1922, 1925, and an earlier one, probably 1916

Victorian Country Party, Constitution and Rules, Melbourne, 1928

Country Progressive Party, Constitution and Rules, Political Platform & Policy, Ouyen, [1928]

(All these are held in the office of the Victorian Country Party, 123-5 William Street, Melbourne)

(iv) WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Primary Producers' Association of Western Australia, Constitution, Branch Rules, and Political Platform, Perth [1935] (Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University)

(v) SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Farmers and Settlers' Association of South Australia, Constitution and Rules, Adelaide, 1916 (L.S.A.)

Country Party Association of South Australia, Constitution and Rules, Adelaide, [no date] (L.S.A.)

NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

A. Dailies and Weeklies

(i) METROPOLITAN

Advertiser, Adelaide
Age, Melbourne
Argus, Melbourne
Australasian, Melbourne
Courier, Brisbane
Daily News, Perth
Daily Telegraph, Sydney
Examiner, Launceston
Mercury, Hobart
Smith's Weekly, Sydney
Sun-News Pictorial, Melbourne
Sydney Morning Herald
West Australian, Perth

(ii) NEW SOUTH WALES

Armidale Express
Daily Advertiser, Wagga Wagga
Daily Observer, Tamworth (later *Northern Daily Leader*)
Glen Innes Examiner
Grafton Examiner
Narrandera Argus
Northern Star, Lismore
Tenterfield Star
Wagga Wagga Express
Warialda Standard

(iii) VICTORIA

Bairnsdale Advertiser
Benalla Standard
Bendigo Advertiser
Horsham Times
Kerang Observer
Rochester Express
Sunraysia Daily

(iv) WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Albany Advertiser
Bunbury Herald
Pingelly Leader
Wagin Argus

(v) SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Loxton Clarion
Pinnaroo and Border Times

(vi) QUEENSLAND

Townsville Daily Bulletin

B. Periodicals

The Elector, Brisbane (N.L.)
The Graziers' Review, Brisbane (M.L.)
Main Roads, Sydney (M.L.)
The New State Magazine, Tamworth, 1921 to 1923 (N.L.)
The Pastoralists' Review, Melbourne (N.L.)
The Voice of the North, Newcastle (M.L.)

C. Country Party Newspapers

Countryman, Melbourne (S.L.V.)
Country News, Adelaide (L.S.A.)
Farmers' Advocate, Melbourne (S.L.V.)
Farmer and Settler, Sydney (M.L.)
Farmers' and Settlers' Bulletin, Adelaide (L.S.A.)
Land, Sydney (M.L.)
Morning Post, Melbourne (S.L.V.)
Producers' Review, Toowoomba (O.L.)
Sunday Times, Perth (From 1914 until 1916 featured the 'Farmers' and Settlers' Gazette', run by the F.S.A.)
Primary Producer, Perth (W.A.)
Stock and Station Journal, Sydney (M.L.)

D. Other Party Newspapers

Liberal Record, Adelaide, 1911 to 1913 (L.S.A.)
Liberal Leader, Adelaide, 1918 to 1925 (L.S.A.)
South Australian, Adelaide, 1925 to 1929 (L.S.A.)

OTHER MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

A. Northern New State League Records

(Held in the Archives Section, University of New England Library, Armidale)

Minutes of the New State Press League, 1920
Minutes of the Northern New State League Executive, 1920 to 1930
Minutes of All Australia New States Movement Executive, 1924 to 1925
Minutes of Armidale New State Convention, 1921

B. Collections of Private Papers

A. E. Cosh, Inverell (N.L.)
Sir John Forrest (W.A.)
W. A. Holman (M.L.)
W. M. Hughes (selected papers) (N.L.)
J. P. McCurry, Rochester (N.L.)
Dr W. K. Rolph (Library of the Australian National University)
John Sanderson (W.A.)
Hon. W. E. Wearne (N.L. and Mr J. T. Wearne, Bingara)
Hon. M. E. Wettenhall (N.L.)
Goldsbrough, Mort & Co. Ltd (Business Archives, Australian National University)

C. Unpublished Theses

Abidin, Z., 'The Origins and Development of the Queensland Country Party, 1909-1932'. M.A., University of Queensland, 1958

Aitkin, D. A., 'The Organisation of the Australian Country Party (N.S.W.), 1946 to 1962'. Ph.D., Australian National University, 1964.

————, 'The United Country Party in New South Wales, 1932-1941, A Study of Electoral Support'. M.A., University of New England, 1960.

Barley, K. P., 'A History of Two Victorian Farmers' Organisations, The Royal Agricultural Society and the Chamber of Agriculture'. M.Agric.Science, University of Melbourne, 1952.

Cameron, R. E., 'Pastoralists' Organisations in Queensland, 1884-1900'. B.A., University of Queensland, 1956.

Graham, B. D., 'The Political Strategies of the Australian Country Parties, From their Origins until 1929'. Ph.D., Australian National University, 1958.

Harney, R. M., 'The Development of Political Parties in Queensland 1879-1896'. B.A., University of Queensland, 1961.

Ingham, S. M., 'Some Aspects of Victorian Liberalism, 1880-1900'. M.A., University of Melbourne, 1949.

Kiernan, C. P., 'Political Parties in the Victorian Legislative Assembly, 1901-1904'. B.A., University of Melbourne, 1954.

Knox, B. A., 'The Honourable Sir Arthur Morgan, Kt., His Public Life and Work'. B.A., University of Queensland, 1956.

Long, D. M., 'A History of the New England Region in the Nineteenth Century'. M.A., University of Sydney, 1950.

Martin, A. W., 'Political Groupings in New South Wales, 1872-1889'. Ph.D., Australian National University, 1955.

Moore, Evelyn, 'The Causes of the Agitation, After 1901, for the Establishment of a New State in Northern New South Wales'. B.A., New England University College, 1953.

Paul, J. B., 'The Premiership of Sir Albert Dunstan'. M.A., University of Melbourne, 1960.

Rawson, D. W., 'The Organisation of the Australian Labour Party, 1916-1941'. Ph.D., University of Melbourne, 1954.

D. Cyclostyled Papers presented at Conferences of the Australian Political Science Association

Aitkin, D. A., 'Voting Trends in Country Electorates'. Third Conference, Sydney, 1961.

Graham, B. D., 'Pools and Politics: The Issue of Co-operative Marketing in the Wheat and Wool Industries, 1910-1922'. Fifth Conference, Melbourne, 1963.

Shipp, G., 'The Bruce-Page Coalition, 1922-25: An Analysis'. Fourth Conference, Canberra, 1962.

E. Miscellaneous

Colebatch, Sir Hal, 'Autobiography' (Archives Section, W.A.).

Ellis, U. R., 'Select References and Basic Facts for the Guidance of Students concerning the origins of the Federal Country Party'. Canberra, 1954 (N.L.).

Parnaby, O., 'Victoria and the Riverina'. Paper read to the 1949 A.N.Z.A.A.S. Meeting, Melbourne.

Prater, H. J., 'Brief History of the Country Party of Western Australia', dated 20 July 1953. (Farmers' Union Office, 239-43 Adelaide Terrace, Perth.)

'Particulars of Negotiations of the Liberal Federation with the Country Party Association which commenced in September, 1925, and reached a successful conclusion with the formation of the Liberal and Country League on June 9th, 1932'. (Liberal-Country League Office, Adelaide.)

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Airey, Willis, 'André Siegfried's *Democracy in New Zealand*: Fifty Years After', *Political Science* (Wellington, N.Z.), VI, 2, Sept. 1954, pp. 33-51.

Alford, F. S., 'Bulk Handling of Wheat in Australia', *Economic Record* (Melbourne), VIII, 1, May 1932, pp. 41-54.

Atkinson, M. (ed.), *Australia, Economic and Political Studies*, London, 1920.

Australia. Its Land, Conditions and Prospects. The Observations and Experiences of the Scottish Agricultural Commission of 1910-11, Edinburgh and London, 1911.

The Australian Environment, second edition, Melbourne, 1950.

The Australian Tariff. An Economic Enquiry, Melbourne, 1929.

Baker, D. W. A., 'The Origins of Robertson's Land Acts', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, VIII, 30, May 1958, pp. 166-82.

Barnard, Alan, *The Australian Wool Market, 1840-1900*, Melbourne, 1958.

————, 'A Century and a Half of Wool Marketing', in Barnard (ed.), *The Simple Fleece. Studies in the Australian Wool Industry*, Melbourne, 1962, pp. 475-89.

Barrett, Russell H., *Promises and Performances in Australian Politics, 1928-1959*, New York, 1959.

Battye, J. S. (ed.), *The Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, vol. II, Perth, 1913.

Bayley, W. A., *History of the Farmers and Settlers' Association of N.S.W.*, Sydney, 1957.

Beasley, F. R., *Open Market Versus Pooling in Australia*, Sydney, 1928.

Bernays, C. A., *Queensland: Our Seventh Political Decade, 1920-1930*, Sydney, 1931.

————, *Queensland Politics During Sixty (1859-1919) Years*, Brisbane, [1919].

British Australian Wool Realisation Association Ltd, *Annual Reports, 1921-26.*

————, Reports of General and Extraordinary Meetings, 1921-26.

Browne, F. C., *They Called Him Billy*, Sydney, n.d.

Bruce, Rt Hon. S. M., *The Financial and Economic Position of Australia*, Adelaide, 1927 (Joseph Fisher Lecture in Commerce).

Brune, A. de, *Fifty Years of Progress in Australia, 1878-1928*, Sydney, 1929.

Brunner, Edmund de S., *Rural Australia and New Zealand*, New York, 1938.

Bryce, J., *Modern Democracies*, vol. II, London, 1929.

Buck, S. J., *The Agrarian Crusade. A Chronicle of the Farmer in Politics*, New Haven, 1920.

————, *The Granger Movement, A Study of Agricultural Organization and its Political, Economic and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880*, Cambridge, Mass., 1913.

Callaghan, A. R., and Millington, A. J., *The Wheat Industry in Australia*, Sydney, 1956.

Campbell, Ian, 'Groups, Parties and Federation', in *Groups in Theory and Practice. Sydney Studies in Politics: 1*, Melbourne, 1962, pp. 45-90.

Campbell, P., Mills, R. C., and Portus, G. V. (eds.), *Studies in Australian Affairs*, Melbourne, 1928.

Carboch, Dagmar, 'The Fall of the Bruce-Page Government', *Studies in Australian Politics*, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 119-282.

Claspy, E. M., *An Atlas of Political Parties in Australia and the United States*, U.S. Office of War Information, 1944.

Coleman, Peter, 'The Liberal and Country Parties: Platforms, Policies and Performances', in *Forces in Australian Politics*, ed. John Wilkes, Sydney, 1963, pp. 1-17.

Copland, D. B., *Monetary Policy and Its Application to Australia*, Melbourne, 1926.

———— (ed.), *The Australian Wool Annual*, Melbourne, 1928.

Crisp, L. F., *The Australian Federal Labour Party*, London, 1955.

————, *Ben Chifley: A Biography*, Melbourne, 1961.

————,'New Light on the Trials and Tribulations of W. M. Hughes, 1920-1922', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, x, 37, Nov. 1961, pp. 86-91.

————, *The Parliamentary Government of the Commonwealth of Australia*, Adelaide, 1949.

Crowley, F. K., *Australia's Western Third. A History of Western Australia from the First Settlements to Modern Times*, London, 1960.

Currie, A. W., *Canadian Economic Development*, Toronto, 1942.

Davies, A. F., *Australian Democracy*, Melbourne, 1958.

————, *Private Politics. A Study of Five Political Outlooks*, Melbourne, 1962 (multilith).

(See also Leeper, G. W.)

Davis, Joseph S., 'Planned Agricultural Adjustment in the United States, 1933-1934', in *Commodity Control in the Pacific Area. A Symposium on Recent Experience*, ed. W. L. Holland, London, 1935, pp. 17-89.

Davis, S. R. (ed.), *The Australian Political Party System*, Sydney, 1954.

———— (ed.), *The Government of the Australian States*, Melbourne, 1960.

————, and Hughes, Colin A., 'The Literature of Australian Government and Politics'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, IV, 1, Aug. 1958, pp. 107-33.

Denning, W., *Caucus Crisis, The Rise and Fall of the Scullin Government*, Parramatta, 1937.

Drane, N. T., and Edwards, H. R., *The Australian Dairy Industry. An Economic Study*, Melbourne, 1961.

Drummond, D. H., 'The New States Movement, Its Basis and Objective', *Australian Quarterly*, June 1931, pp. 46-57.

Duncan, W. G. K. (ed.), *Marketing Australia's Primary Products*, Sydney, 1937.

———— (ed.), *Trends in Australian Politics*, Sydney, 1935.

Dunsdorfs, Edgars, *The Australian Wheat-Growing Industry, 1788-1948*, Melbourne, 1956.

————, and L., *Historical Statistics of the Australian Wheatgrowing Industry, Acreage and Average Yield in Counties and Divisions, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, 1792-1950*, Melbourne, 1956.

Duverger, M., 'The Influence of the Electoral System on Political Life', *International Social Science Bulletin (U.N.E.S.C.O.)*, Summer, 1951.

————, *Political Parties, Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, London, 1954.

Dyason, E. C., 'BAWRA', *Economic Record* (Melbourne), Supplement, Feb. 1928, pp. 51-67.

Eggleston, F. W., 'Australian Politics and the Federal Elections', *Australian Quarterly*, March 1929, pp. 7-20.

————, *Reflections of an Australian Liberal*, Melbourne, 1953.

————, *State Socialism in Victoria*, London, 1932.

Ellis, Ulrich, *The Country Party. A Political and Social History of the Party in New South Wales*, Melbourne, 1958.

————, *A History of the Australian Country Party*, Melbourne, 1963.

————, *New Australian States*, Sydney, 1933.

Encel, S., *Cabinet Government in Australia*, Melbourne, 1962.

————, 'The Concept of the State in Australian Politics', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, VI, 1, May 1960, pp. 62-76.

————, 'The Political Elite in Australia', *Political Studies*, IX, 1, 1961, pp. 16-36.

Evatt, H. V., *Australian Labour Leader. The Story of W. A. Holman and the Labour Movement*, abridged edition, Sydney, 1954.

————, *The King and His Dominion Governors*, London, 1936.

Fitzpatrick, B., *The British Empire in Australia. An Economic History, 1834-1939*, second edition, Melbourne, 1949.

Garnett, A. Campbell (ed.), *Freedom and Planning in Australia*, Wisconsin, 1949 (especially J. P. Abbott, 'Contemporary Party Policies: The Country Party').

Gerth, H. H., and Mills, C. Wright (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, London, 1947.

Gollan, Robin, *The Coalminers of New South Wales. A History of the Union, 1860-1960*, Melbourne, 1963.

————, 'Industrial Relations in the Pastoral Industry', in Alan Barnard (ed.), *The Simple Fleece. Studies in the Australian Wool Industry*, Melbourne, 1962, pp. 602-12.

————, *Radical and Working Class Politics: A Study of Eastern Australia, 1850-1910*, Melbourne, 1960.

Graham, B. D., 'The Choice of Voting Methods in Federal Politics, 1902-1918', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, VIII, 2, Nov. 1962, pp. 164-81.

————, 'The Country Party and the Formation of the Bruce-Page Ministry', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, X, 37, Nov. 1961, pp. 71-85.

————, 'The Country Party Idea in New Zealand Politics, 1901-1935', *Studies of a Small Democracy. Essays in Honour of Willis Airey*, Robert Chapman and Keith Sinclair (eds.), Sydney, 1963, pp. 175-200.

————, 'Graziers in Politics, 1917-1929', in Alan Barnard (ed.), *The Simple Fleece. Studies in the Australian Wool Industry*, Melbourne, 1962, pp. 592-601.

————, 'The Place of Finance Committees in Non-Labor Politics, 1910-1930', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, VI, 1, May 1960, pp. 41-52

Grattan, C. H. (ed.), *Australia*, Los Angeles, 1947.

Green, F. C. (ed.), *Tasmania. A Century of Responsible Government*, Hobart, 1956.

Greenwood, G. (ed.), *Australia. A Social and Political History*, Sydney, 1955.

Groom, Lady Jessie (ed.) and Fitzhardinge, L. F., *Nation Building in Australia, The Life and Work of Sir Littleton Ernest Groom*, Sydney, 1941.

Gurvitch, G. and Moore, W. E. (eds.), *Twentieth Century Sociology*, New York, 1945.

Hancock, W. K., *Australia*, first Australian edition, London, 1945.

Haskell, E. S., 'Stabilization Operations of the Federal Farm Board', *Commodity Control in the Pacific Area, A Symposium on Recent Experience*, ed. W. L. Holland, London, 1935, pp. 90-124.

Hicks, John D., *The Populist Revolt. A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, Minneapolis, 1931.

Higgins, Sir John M., *The Stabilisation or the Equalisation or the Insurance of Wool Values*, Melbourne, 1931.

Hitchins, F. Eric, *Tangled Skeins. A Historic Survey of Australian Wool Marketing*, Melbourne, [1956].

Hofstadter, Richard, *The Age of Reform. From Bryan to F.D.R.*, New York, 1955.

Holcombe, Arthur N., *The Political Parties of To-day. A study in Republican and Democratic Politics*, New York, 1924.

Holmes, J. M., *The Geographical Basis of Government*, Sydney, 1944.

Holt, A. J., *Wheat Farms of Victoria*, Melbourne, 1946.

Hyams, B. K., 'Western Australian Political Parties: 1901-1916', *University Studies in History and Economics* (Perth), XI, 3, Sept. 1955, pp. 48-61.

Ingham, S. M., 'Political Parties in the Victorian Legislative Assembly, 1880-1900', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, IV, 15, Nov. 1950, pp. 241-56.

John Cooke & Co. Proprietary Ltd., and Field v. *The Commonwealth and the Central Wool Committee*, 1922, 31 C.L.R., 394.

Johnstone, Paul H., 'Old Ideals Versus New Ideas in Farm Life', *The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1940*, Washington, D.C., 1940, pp. 111-70.

Joyner, Conrad, 'Attempts to Extend Commonwealth Powers, 1908-1919', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, IX, 35, Nov. 1960, pp. 295-307.

————, *The Commonwealth and Monopolies, Sydney Studies in Politics: 4*, Melbourne, 1963.

————, *Holman Versus Hughes: Extension of Australian Commonwealth Powers*, Florida, 1961.

————, 'W. M. Hughes and the "Powers" Referendum of 1919: A Master Politician at Work', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, V, 1, May 1959, pp. 15-23.

Jupp, James, *Australian Party Politics*, Melbourne, 1964.

Key, V. O., *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups*, New York, 1950.

Kile, Orville M., *The Farm Bureau Movement*, New York, 1921.

King, C. J., 'An Outline of Closer Settlement in New South Wales, Part I, The Sequence of the Land Laws 1788-1956', *Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics*, XXV, 3-4, Sept.-Dec. 1957.

Kolb, J. H. and Brunner, E. de S., *A Study of Rural Society*, Boston, 1946.

Lakeman, Enid and Lambert, J. D., *Voting in Democracies*, London, 1955.

La Nauze, J., *Political Economy in Australia*, Melbourne, 1949.

Lang, J. T., *The Great Bust*, Sydney, 1962.

————, *I Remember*, Sydney, 1956.

Langford-Smith, T., *The Economic Resources of Australia*, Canberra, 1951.

————, *Water Supply in the Agricultural Areas of Western Australia*, Sydney, 1947.

Lasswell, H. D. and Kaplan, A., *Power and Society. A Framework for Political Enquiry*, New Haven, 1950.

Leighton, A. H., *The Governing of Man*, Princeton, N.J., 1946.

Leeper, G. W. (ed.), *Introducing Victoria*, Melbourne, 1955 (especially A. F. Davies, 'Victorian Government and Politics').

Lipset, S. M., *Agrarian Socialism, The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan, A Study in Political Sociology*, Los Angeles, 1950.

Lipson, L., 'The Two Party System in British Politics', *The American Political Science Review*, June 1953, pp. 337-58.

Lorimer, J. A., 'The Riverina Movement', *Australian Quarterly*, June 1931, pp. 58-63.

McConnell, Grant, *The Decline of Agrarian Democracy*, Los Angeles, 1953.

McHenry, Dean E., *The Third Force in Canada. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, 1932-1948*, Los Angeles, 1950.

McIntyre, A. J. and J. J., *Country Towns of Victoria*, Melbourne, 1944.

MacIver, R. M., *The Web of Government*, New York, 1947.

Mackay, Kenneth C., *The Progressive Movement of 1924*, New York, 1947.

McKean, D. D., *Party and Pressure Politics*, Cambridge, Mass., 1949.

McKenzie, R. T., *British Political Parties. The Distribution of Power within the Conservative and Labour Parties*, London, 1955.

Macpherson, C. B., *Democracy in Alberta, The Theory and Practice of a Quasi-Party System*, Toronto, 1953.

Malenbaum, Wilfred, *The World Wheat Economy, 1885-1939*, Cambridge, Mass., 1953.

Mannheim, K., *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, London, 1940.

Martin, A. W., 'Free Trade and Protectionist Parties in New South Wales', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, VI, 23 Nov. 1954, pp. 315-23.

————, 'Pastoralists in the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, 1870-1890', in Alan Barnard (ed.), *The Simple Fleece. Studies in the Australian Wool Industry*, Melbourne, 1962, pp. 577-91.

Mayer, Henry, 'Liberal-Country Party Rivalry is Real and Permanent', *Voice* (Sydney), IV, 12, Dec. 1955.

————, 'Some Conceptions of the Australian Party System, 1910-1950', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, VII, 27, Nov. 1956, pp. 253-70.

Mercer, F. R., *On Farmers' Service. A Short History of Farmers' Organisation in Western Australia*, Perth, 1955.

Merton, R. K., *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Glencoe, Illinois, 1951.

Michels, Robert, *Political Parties, A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (translated by Eden and Cedar Paul), New York, 1959.

Miller, J. D. B., *Australian Government and Politics* (second ed.), London, 1961.

Mills, R. C., 'The Tariff Board of Australia', *Economic Record* (Melbourne), III, May 1927, pp. 52-81.

Moore, W. Harrison, 'Political Systems of Australia', in Meredith Atkinson (ed.), *Australia—Economic and Political Studies*, Melbourne, 1920.

Morlan, Robert L., *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922*, Minneapolis, 1955.

Morton, W. L., *The Progressive Party in Canada*, Toronto, 1950.

Nash, Howard P., *Third Parties in American Politics*, Washington, 1959.

Neale, R. G., 'The New England New State', *Australian Quarterly*, XXVII, 3, Sept. 1955, pp. 18-29.

————, 'The New State Movement in Queensland', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, IV, 15, Nov. 1950, pp. 198-213.

————, 'New States Movements', *Australian Quarterly*, XXII, 3, Sept. 1950, pp. 9-23.

Neilson, H. L., *The Voice of the People*, Melbourne, 1902.

New States for Australia, Sydney, 1955.

Norris, Frank, *The Octopus. A Story of California*, New York, reprinted 1958.

Oeser, O. A., and Hammond, S. B. (eds.), *Social Structure and Personality in a Rural Community*, London, 1954.

Ostrogorski, M., *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, vol. 1, London, 1902.

Overacker, Louise, *The Australian Party System*, New Haven, 1952.

Page, Sir Earle, *Truant Surgeon, The Inside Story of Forty Years of Australian Political Life*, ed. Ann Mozley, Sydney, 1963.

Parker, R. S., 'Australian Federation: The Influence of Economic Interests and Political Pressures', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, IV, 13, Nov. 1949, pp. 1-24.

Patton, Harold S., 'The Canadian Wheat Pool in Prosperity and Depression', *Commodity Control in the Pacific Area, A Symposium on Recent Experience*, ed. W. L. Holland, London, 1935, pp. 125-56.

Rawson, D. W., *Australia Votes. The 1958 Federal Election*, Melbourne, 1961.

Redfield, Robert, *The Little Community* and *Peasant Society and Culture*, Chicago, 1960.

Roberts, Stephen H., *History of Australian Land Settlement*, Melbourne, 1924.

Robertson, J. R., 'The Foundations of State Socialism in Western Australia: 1911-16', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, X, 39, Nov. 1962, pp. 309-26.

————, 'The First Years of the Western Australian Country Party, 1912-1916', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, XI, 43, Oct. 1964, pp. 343-60.

Rowley, C. D., 'Clarence River Separatism in 1860; a Problem of Communications', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, I, 4, Oct. 1941, pp. 225-44.

Rydon, Joan, 'Electoral Methods and the Australian Party System: 1910-1951', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, II, 1, Nov. 1956, pp. 68-83.

————, and Spann, R. N., *New South Wales Politics 1901-1910, Sydney Studies in Politics: 2*, Melbourne, 1962.

Sandford, John, *Walter Harper and the Farmers*, Perth, 1955.

Sawer, G., *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1901-1929*, Melbourne, 1956.

————, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1929-1949*, Melbourne, 1963.

————, *Australian Government Today*, Melbourne, 1948.

Scarrow, Howard A., *Canada Votes, A Handbook of Federal and Provincial Election Data*, New Orleans, 1962.

Shannon, Ian, *Rural Industries in the Australian Economy*, Melbourne, 1955.

Scott, Ernest, *Australia During the War*, 2nd ed., Sydney, 1937.

Siegfried, André, *Democracy in New Zealand*, London, 1914.
Smith, A. N., *Thirty Years: The Commonwealth of Australia, 1901-1931*, Melbourne, 1933.
Smith, W. Millar, *The Marketing of Australian and New Zealand Primary Products*, London, 1936.
Sorokin, P., *Society, Culture and Personality. Their Structure and Dynamics*, New York, 1947.
The State of New South Wales v. *The Commonwealth*, 1915, 20 C.L.R., 54.
Tapp, E. J., 'The Colonial Origins of the New England New State Movement', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, XLIX, 3, Nov. 1963, pp. 205-21.
Taylor, Griffith, *Australia in its Physiographic and Economic Aspects*, Oxford, 1911.
Truman, David B., *The Governmental Process, Political Interests and Public Opinion*, New York, 1951.
Turner, Ken, 'From Liberal to National in New South Wales', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, x, 2, Aug. 1964, pp. 205-20.
Veblen, Thorstein, *Absentee Ownership and Business Enterprise in Recent Times, The Case of America*, London, [1924].
W. & A. McArthur Ltd. v. *State of Queensland*, 1919-20, 28 C.L.R., 530.
Wadham, S. M., *Necessary Principles for Satisfactory Agricultural Development in Australia*, Adelaide, 1946 (Josef Fisher Memorial Lecture in Commerce).
———— and Wood, G. L., *Land Utilization in Australia*, Melbourne, 1939.
Ward, Russel, *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne, 1958.
Whitington, D., *The House Will Divide*, Melbourne, 1954.
————, *Ring the Bells*, Melbourne, 1956.
Whyte, W. Farmer, *William Morris Hughes. His Life and Times*, Sydney, 1957.
Wildavsky, Aaron, 'The 1926 Referendum', *Studies in Australian Politics*, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 1-118.
Wilson, L. and Kolb, W. L., *Sociological Analysis*, New York, 1949.
Wood, G. L., 'Wheat Pools, with Special Reference to Australia', *Economic Record* (Melbourne), Supplement, Feb. 1928, pp. 18-37.

PAMPHLETS

An Open Letter to the Anti-Extremist Electors of New South Wales, Hon. J. H. Carruthers, Sydney, [1922]. (M.L.)
As Others See Us, [Nhill, 1935]. (M. E. Wettenhall Papers, N.L.)
Australian Country Party, 1922-1928, Achievements, Sydney, 1928. (Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University)
Australian Subdivision. Effect on Development. The Case for Northern New South Wales, Glen Innes, 1920. (M.L.)
The Australian Wheat Pooling Scheme. A Brief Review. Issued by the Australian Wheat Board, Melbourne, 1918. (W.A.)
Bruxner, Col. M. F., *The Road*, Sydney, 1928. (M.L.)
Churches, F. J., *The Organisation of Primary Industries, Royal Commission on Constitutional Amendment, Evidence submitted by F. J. Churches, General Secretary, Country Progressive Party*, Melbourne, [1928]. (Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University)

Copy of Correspondence between Sir John Forrest and Mr. A. J. Monger. (President of the Farmers' and Settlers' Association), Perth, [1914]. (W.A.)

Country Party Campaign, Melbourne, 1919. (N.L.)

The Country Party of New South Wales. A Manual for Country Party Speakers, Sydney, 1930. (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), 7 Phillip Street, Sydney)

The Country Party of New South Wales, Policy Speech, Delivered by Hon. E. A. Buttenshaw at Condobolin, 23/9/30. (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)

The Country Party of N.S.W., Policy Speech delivered by Mr. E. A. Buttenshaw, M.L.A., West Wyalong, 13/9/27, Sydney, 1927. (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)

The Doctrine of Revolution, Melbourne, 1925. (N.L.)

Do You Want a New State? Series of Questions for the Use of Witnesses, Tamworth, [1924]. (Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University)

Entwistle, John, *The F.S.A. Movement: What It Is and What It Stands For. Facts for the assistance of Branch Members in addressing Meetings of Farmers*, Adelaide, [1919]. (L.S.A.)

Farmers & Settlers' Association of New South Wales. What it has done, Sydney, [*c.* 1955]. (Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University)

Farmer-Progressive's Manifesto to the Electors of the Northern Tablelands, [1920]. (A. E. Cosh Papers, N.L.)

The Federal Composite Ministry, The Three Years' Record, Summary of Measures Passed, Melbourne, 1925. (Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University)

Federal Elections, Nov. 14th, 1925, Sydney, 1925. (N.L.)

Fitzhardinge, L. F., *W. M. Hughes in New South Wales Politics, 1890-1900*, Sydney, 1951. (N.L.)

F.S.A. Case Against Amalgamation, [Adelaide, 1921]. (L.S.A.)

Graziers in Politics, Annual Conference Debate, How the Decisions were Made, Sydney, 1919. (Enclosed in *G.A. Conference Minutes*, 1919)

Holmes, J. M., *The 'New States' Idea and its Geographical Background*, Sydney, 1933. (M.L.)

The Inverell District Exhibit, competes under the auspices of the Inverell P. and A. Association, at Royal Sydney Show, 1914, Inverell, [1914]. (A. E. Cosh Papers, N.L.)

Jowett, Edmund, *The Ruinous Fall in the Prices of Wheat, Wool, &c., The Chief Cause, The Remedy within Reach*, Melbourne and Bendigo, [1894]. (A.A. Company Records, Australian National University Archives, Deposit 1/119)

Liberals and Political Relations, Official History of the Negotiations, Issued by the Executive Committee of the Liberal Union, Adelaide, 1921. (Liberal-Country League Office, Adelaide)

Namoi Progressive League, 1916. (W. Wearne Papers, c/o Mr J. T. Wearne, Bingara, N.S.W.)

The National Federation. Political Platforms, Constitution and Rules, Melbourne, 1921. (Groom Pamphlets, Vol. 2, N.L.)

The National Federation, State Council of Western Australia, Constitution and Platform, Perth, [1917]. (W.A.)

New South Wales Elections, October 8, 1927, The National Policy, Speech delivered by Hon. T. R. Bavin, M.L.A., Chatswood, 8/9/27, Sydney, 1927. (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)

New South Wales Elections, October 25, 1930, The National Policy, Delivered by T. R. Bavin at Killara, 18/9/30, Sydney, 1930. (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)

N.S.W. State Elections, March 25th, 1922, The Platform and Policy of the National-Progressive Party, Speeches delivered by Sir George Fuller, K.C.M.G., M.L.A., at Wollongong, February 20, 1922 and Goulburn, March 13, 1922, Sydney, 1922. (M.L.)

A New State, Proposed Separation of Northern New South Wales, (Supplement to *Walcha Witness*) [1915]. (Archives Section, University of New England Library, Armidale, N.S.W.)

The New State in Northern New South Wales, Resources-Finance-Government, Statement of the Case by Dr. Earle Page, M.P., Treasurer for the Commonwealth, To the New South Wales Commission on New States, Tamworth, [1924]. (Department of Political Science, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University)

New States, Brief History of Movement in North and Elsewhere, Issued by Northern Central Executive on occasion of the 1929 Armidale Convention, Tamworth, [1929]. (Archives Section, University of New England Library, Armidale, N.S.W.)

New States, Why They are necessary in Australia, Speech by Dr. Earle Page, Acting Prime Minister and Treasurer of the Commonwealth, At the New State Convention, Rockhampton, October, 1923, Tamworth, [1923]. (Archives Section, University of New England Library, Armidale, N.S.W.)

Northern New State, Case Outlined in N.S.W. State Parliament on Aug. 22, 1922 by Lieut.-Col. Bruxner, M.L.A., Tamworth, 1922. (Archives Section, University of New England Library, Armidale, N.S.W., and M.L.)

Northern New State Movement (New South Wales). Official Report of Proceedings of the Second Convention, Held in Town Hall, Armidale on June 5, 6 & 7, 1923, Tamworth, [1923]. (Archives Section, University of New England Library, Armidale, N.S.W.)

Northern New State Movement. Official Report of the Third Convention, held at Armidale on April 22, 23, 24, 1929, Tamworth, [1929]. (Archives Section, University of New England Library, Armidale, N.S.W.)

Notes regarding the Shipping Strike and the Federal Elections, Sydney, 1925. (N.L.)

O'Flaherty, S., *A Synopsis of the Formation and Historical Records of the Australian Labor Party, South Australian Branch,* Woodville, 1956. (N.L.)

Policy Speech delivered by The Hon. H. S. W. Lawson, Premier of Victoria, at Castlemaine, 8th August, 1921, Melbourne, [1921]. (S.L.V.)

Price, J. J., *The Progressive Party of New South Wales, Its Origins and History,* Sydney, 1924. (N.L.)

The Progressive Party of N.S.W., Policy Speech, Delivered by Lieut.-Colonel M. F. Bruxner, M.L.A., Goulburn, 28/4/25, Sydney, 1925. (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)

The Real History of the Coalition, A Final Word from the Seven Progressives, Sydney, March 1922. (U.R. Ellis Collection)

Report of Proceedings of the Country Parliamentary Committee, Sydney, [1920]. (W. Wearne Papers, c/o Mr J. T. Wearne, Bingara, N.S.W.)
Riverina New State Movement, Tamworth, [1922]. (Archives Section, University of New England Library, Armidale, N.S.W.)
State Elections, Lowan, The Hon. M. E. Wettenhall's Policy Speech, Bank Hall, Dimboola. Tuesday, March 22, 1927, Dimboola, 1927. (M. E. Wettenhall Papers, N.L.)
To the Electors of Namoi, Sydney, [1922]. (W. Wearne Papers, c/o Mr J. T. Wearne, Bingara, N.S.W.)
The Hon. M. E. Wettenhall's Account of his Stewardship, 1921-1924, and his Policy Speech, Horsham, 1924. (M. E. Wettenhall Papers, N.L.)
Wettenhall, Hon. M. E., *A Review of the Political Situation As It Affects Country Interests*, Melbourne, [1926]. (M. E. Wettenhall Papers, N.L.)
Who's Who in the Progressive Party, A Prosperous Countryside means Stable National Life, Sydney, [1925]. (Office of Country Party (N.S.W.), Sydney)
The Year's Record of the Country Party and the Progressive Party in New South Wales. Report for the Period ending 28th February, 1923, Sydney, 1923. (Enclosed in *G.A. Conference Minutes*, 1923)

INTERVIEWS

Abbott, C. L. A., Bowral, 8 August 1956.
Bruce, Lord (Rt Hon. Stanley Melbourne), Canberra, 3 December 1957.
Bruxner, Col. M. F., Sydney, 28 June 1956.
Buttenshaw, Mrs E. A., Sydney, 29 June 1956.
Cosh, A. E., Tenterfield, 27 July 1956.
Drummond, Hon. D. H., Canberra, 4 October 1956.
Graham, John, Wagga Wagga, 23 July 1956.
Hanslow, H., Melbourne, 20 August 1956.
Latham, Sir Charles, Perth, 14 November 1956.
Latham, Sir John, Melbourne, 20 August 1956.
Lind, Sir Albert, Melbourne, 30 October 1956.
Lorimer, J. A., Narrandera, 24 July 1956.
Main, Hon. Hugh, Canberra, 17 July 1956.
Page, Sir Earle, Canberra, 22 February, 7 March, and 9 May 1956.
Prater, H. J., Perth, 13 November 1956.
Saunders, P. A., Armidale, 30 July 1956.
Vincent, R. S., Sydney, 28 June 1956.

Index

Abbott, C. L. A., 234, 284, 286, 288
Agrarian movements: attitude to the state, 15-16; Australian, 38-54, 291-3; Canadian, 7-8, 18-19, 23-7; class myths, 15-18; comparison with peasant movements, 291; leadership, 17; response to economic trends, 16-17, (and third parties) 19-20; U.S.A., 3-7, 17-19, 22-3
Agricultural banks, 237
Allan, John, 126, 249; coalitions (with Lawson, Sept. 1923) 198-9, (with Peacock, Nov. 1924) 203-5; C.P. (resignation as leader, 1933) 265, (reunification with Country Progressive Party) 256, 262-5; federal election pact (1924-5), 226-7; in 1918-20 parliament, 158, 161; life, 159-60; McPherson government (1928-9), 261; ministries (with Argyle, 1932-5) 265, (with Lawson, 1923-4) 198-201, (with Peacock, 1924-7) 204-5, 243, 249-56; Premier (1924-7), 249-56; Prendergast Labor government (1924), 202-3; V.F.U. and 1924 election pact, 199-201; wheat pool crisis, 162-6
Allison, David, 164
American Farm Bureau Federation, 6, 22, 23
American Society of Equity, 6
Angelo, E. H., 218
Appel, J. G., 104
Armidale Express (N.S.W.), 155
Atkinson, L., 131, 132n., 184, 191, 233-4, 288
Australian Butter Stabilization Committee, 244
Australian Country Party Association, 247, 284-6, 288-9
Australian Estates and Mortgage Company, 151
Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation and Australian Country Party Association, 284-6; compulsory pooling, 229; conferences, 127, 130; election pact (1924), 224-5; formation, 100, 113-14; in 1919 federal election, 130, 131n.
Australian Labor Party: federal, 114-15; N.S.W., 59-61, 74-5, 80-2, 115, 168, 270-1; Qld, 92, 180; Vic., 71, 74-5, 84, 262
Australian Legion (Vic.), 183, 184
Australian Meat Council, 228
Australian Mercantile Land and Finance Company, 151
Australian National Federation, 224-5
Australian Railways Union, 138, 255
Australian Seamen's Union, 232
Australian Women's National League, 84
Australian Woolgrowers' Council, 149
Australian Workers' Union, 77, 138

Ball, R. T., 211
Barwell, H. N., 146
Bavin, T. R., 122, 170-2, 205, 242, 271-5 *passim*; Buttenshaw (ministry with, 1927-30), 242-3, 274-8
Baxter, C. F., 117, 123-5, 218, 282
Beeby, G. S., 81, 108-9, 116, 122-3, 170
Bell, G. J., 131, 132n.
Bell and Company, 98, 147, 240
Bennett, Walter, 109, 121, 170
Bent, Thomas, 70-2; ministry (1904-9), 70, 71-2
Bi-metallic Leagues, 10
Blyth, E. F. B., 182
Bourchier, M. W. J., 164n., 204
Bowser, John, 71-2, 73, 132n., 158, 164n., 201; ministry (1917-18), 126, 157
Briner, G. S., 82
British Australian Wool Realisation Association Ltd, 135, 148-51
Broun, F. T., 124, 212-13, 214
Bruce, S. M., 30; and Page (coalition, Feb. 1923) 184-93, (ministry, 1923-9) 30, 191-3, 221-35, 244-7, 282-4, 287-9, (views on coalition) 222, 223; election (1918), 127; election pacts, 202, 223-5, 288-9; in 1925 election, 232; marketing policy, 228, 229; ministers, 287-8; new states movements, 208-9; tariff policy, 247; Treasurer (1921), 182
Bruxner, M. F.; Bavin-Buttenshaw coalition, 274; Bruce-Page coalition, 194; C.P. leadership (resignation, 1925), 271; Fuller government (1922-5), 197, 205-12; leadership, 206-7; life, 206; Minister for Local Government (1927-30), 274, 275, 279; new states movement, 156; non-Labor alliance (1926-7), 270, 272-3; Progressive Party (elected leader, 1922), 173; 'True Blue' crisis (1921), 170-2
Bryan, William Jennings, 5

Buck, Solon, 3-4
Buttenshaw, E. A., 121, 122, 170-2, 241-2, 271-8 *passim*; ministry (with Bavin), 242-3, 274-8

Cameron, A. G., 268-9
Campbell, T. I., 80, 82, 109-10, 121
Canada: agrarian movements, 239; elections, 23, 25, 27; National Progressive Party, 23-7; party system, 23-5
Canadian Council of Agriculture, 8, 23, 24
Canadian Pacific Railway, 7, 18
Carlisle, J. J., 158, 164, 203
Carroll, W., 218, 286-7
Carruthers, J. H., 57-8, 185; ministry (1904-7), 59
Cement, 211-12
Central West electorate (N.S.W.), 81, 139, 273, 275
Central Wool Committee, *see* Wool industry
Chaffey, F. A., 207
Chamber of Agriculture (Vic.), 162
Chamber of Mines (W.A.), 213-14, 219-20
Chanter, J. M., 51-2, 57, 131, 184
Chapman, Austin, 183, 185, 191
Chapman, J. H., 286
Charlton, Matthew, 183
Citizens' Reform League (Vic.), 46, 71
Clarke-James, W. H., 88-9
Colebatch, Sir Hal, 123, 213; ministry (1919), 123
Collier, Philip, 219; ministry (1924-30), 219, 279, 282
Commonwealth Bank, 227-8, 229, 237, 244, 283
Commonwealth Census (1921), 133-4
Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act (1910), 76
Commonwealth Dairy Produce Pool Committee, 151
Commonwealth Farmers' Organisation, 75-6
Commonwealth Shipping Line, 182, 184, 283
Conference for Progressive Political Action (U.S.A.), 22
Constitutional Union, *see* Non-Labor Finance Committees
Consultative Council (N.S.W.), *see* Non-Labor Finance Committees
Cook, Sir Joseph, 128, 177; ministry (1913-14), 78, 92
Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (Canada), 27
Co-operative Dairy Companies' Association (Qld), 152
Corser, B. H., 267, 288
Council of Agriculture (Qld), 228
Country and Progressive National Party (Qld), 267
Country factions: N.S.W., 52, (1893-4) 57-8, (1902) 58-9, (1913-14) 82, (Country Parliamentary Committee, 1918-) 121, 122, 168; Qld, 52; Vic., 9, 52, 72-3, (1886-9) 67-9, 73, (1891-4) 70, (1900-2) 71, (1907-8) 71-2, (1912-13) 83-4, (Economy Party, 1916-) 126
Country parties, Aust.: and North American movements, 28-9; antecedent organizations, 46-54; cane growers, 28; dairy farmers, 28, 118-19, 139, 151-2; formation, 118-19, 139-42, 294-5; graziers, 28, 118-19, 139; in elections, 294-5; leadership, 139, 142, 248-9, 295; marketing (wartime pools) 96-103, (1920s) 238-45; myths, 38-46; new states movements, 154-7; origins, 8-10, 27-30, 53-4, 75-95, 133-42, 291-6; revivalism in late twenties, 247-9; social basis, 27-8, 134-9, 295-6; soldier settlers, 152-3; strategies, 29-30, 142-4, 194-7, 238-9, 247-9; survival in 1920s, 295-6; tariff issues, 153-4, 245-7; wheat farmers, 27-8, 78, 119, 139, 147
Country Party, Federal: Bruce-Page coalition (1923-9), 191-5, 222-7, 232-5, 282-4, 287-90; electoral pacts (1924) 222-7, 232-5, (1928-9) 288-9; Hughes government (1917-23), 176-8, 184-91; in 1922 election, 183-4; leadership, 176; marketing issues, 238-9, 244; members, 128, 130-2, 176-7, 267, 288; new states movements, 156-7, 231-2, 283-4; policy (credit) 227-8, (roads) 227, (shipping) 283, (telephones) 227; strategies, 194-5; tariffs, 153-4, 245-7, 229-31
Country Party, N.S.W.: Bavin-Buttenshaw coalition, 273-8; branches, 273; Central Council, 274, 276, 278; marketing issues, 240-3, 245; National Party (1926-7 alliance), 269-73; *see also* Progressive Party
Country Party, Qld, 119-20, 179-81, 234
Country Party, S.A., 167, 268; *see also* Country Party Association (S.A.)
Country Party, Tas., 181-2, 233-4
Country Party, Vic. (parliamentary): Allan-Peacock coalition, 204-5; early differences, 126, 157-61; formation, 125-6; in 1927 election, 254-5; in parliament (1918-20) 161, (1927-9) 259-62, 264; Labor government support (1924), 202-4; Lawson-Allan agreement (ended, 1924), 199-201; marketing issues (1920s), 243-4; members, 126, 132n., 157-8, 164n., social basis, 138; strategies, 165-6; wheat pool, wartime (decontrol, 1921), 146
Country Party, W.A.: F.S.A., 105-8, 117-18, 124-5; in 1927 election, 281; leadership (Gardiner and Willmott), 104-6, 117-18; Lefroy coalition (June 1917), 117; members, 213, 281, 282; ministerial crisis (1919), 123-4; Mitchell

Country Party, W.A.—*cont.*
coalition (1919-24), 123-5, 179, 212-21; P.P.A., 212-21; recovery (1920s), 279-82; Scaddan Labor government, 104-7; split (1923), 218-21; strategies, 116-18, 123-5; wheat pool (policy), 124-5; Wilson government (1916-17), 107-8, 116-17
Country Party Association (N.S.W.), 81-2
Country Party Association (S.A.), 222-6, 233, 247, 267-9
Country Party Producers' Political Federation (Tas.), 233
Country Progress Association of Western Australia, 75
Country Progressive Party (Vic.), 243-4, 251-62, 264-5, 290; *see also* Primary Producers' Union (Vic.)
Countryman (Vic.), 204, 263
Cox, Sir Owen, 274
Crerar, T. A., 23-5
Crockett, W. P., 198, 204, 250, 252

Daily Observer (Tamworth, N.S.W.), 154
Dairy industry: co-operative manufacturing, 50; compulsory pooling, 224-5; early history, 49-50; post-war marketing, 151-2, 228, (Paterson scheme) 244-5; wartime controls, 98, 151
Dairy Produce Export Control Board, 228
Dairy Produce Inter-State Committee, 245
Dalgety and Company, 98, 147, 240
Darling and Company, 98
Darling Downs, 10, 180-1
Davis, A. H. (Steele Rudd), 41
Deakin, Alfred, 67
Denton, J. S., 218
Dibbs, Sir John: ministry (1891-4), 57
Dooley, James, 168, 169, 172; ministries (1921) 168-9, (1921-2) 172
Downward, Alfred, 71-2, 73, 132n., 158, 164n., 203, 204
Drought, 1914 (W.A.), 104
Drummond, D. H., 156, 170, 270, 274, 275
Dunsdorfs, Edgars, 236
Dunstan, A. A.: Bruce-Page coalition, 194; career (after 1930), 265-6; coalition strategy (1923-4), 199, 201; Country Progressive Party (formation) 251-4, (reunification with Country Party) 264, (leader) 256, 259-60, 261; Labor government (1924), 203, 204; ministry (1935-43), 265-6; wheat pool crisis (1921), 164-6

Eggleston, F. W., 261
Elder Smith and Company Ltd, 102
Elections and referenda: by-elections (Corangamite, 1918) 128, (Echuca, 1919) 130, (Flinders, 1918) 127, (Swan, 1918) 127-8; Commonwealth
Elections and referenda—*cont.*
referenda (conscription, 1916) 114-15, (Constitution amendments, 1919) 119, 145, (intra-state trade, 1911, 1913) 76, 85; federal elections (1906) 74, (1910) 94, (1913) 92, (1914) 92-3, (1917) 115, 125-6, (1919) 130-2, 176, (1922) 183-4, (1925) 232-5, (1928) 256-9, 288, 289, (1929) 247, 284, 288, 289; N.S.W. elections (1894) 57, (1904) 59, (1907) 60, 62, (1913) 9, 81-2, (1917) 115, 116, (1920) 132, 138-9, 141, 167-8, (1922) 173-5, 205, (1925) 212, (1927) 273, (1930) 278; Qld (1912) 90, (1915) 92, 104, (1920) 120, (1929) 267; S.A. (1918) 167, (1921) 167, (1924) 222-3, (1927) 268, (1930) 269; Tas. (1922) 181; Vic. (1889) 52, 69-70, (1892) 70, (1894) 70, (1902) 46, (1907) 71, (1908) 72, (1911) 83, (1914) 85, (1917) 126, 157, (1920) 132, 137, 138, 161, (1921) 146, 163-4, (1924) 202, (1927) 254-5, (1929) 262, (1932) 265, (1935) 265-6; W.A. (1914) 9, 90, (1917) 117-18, (1921) 212, (1924) 219, (1927) 281, (1930) 282
Electoral redistributions, Victorian proposal (1913), 83-4
Electoral systems: preferential voting (Commonwealth) 126-30, (Vic.) 126; proportional representation (N.S.W.), 121, 174; second ballot (N.S.W.), 81; simple majority (Commonwealth), 93-4; S.A., 268-9; Vic., 83-4, 126, 254, 260
Elliott, R. D., 189, 191
Ellis, U. R., 297
Elmslie, G. A., 84; ministry (Dec. 1913), 84
Encel, S., 195
Executive Country Party, *see* Country Party, W.A., split (1923)
Export Guarantee Act (1924-5), 283

Farm Bloc (U.S.A.), 22
Farmer and Settler (Syd.), 64
Farmers' Advocate (Melb.), 151, 164, 165, 190, 194, 199, 204
Farmers and Graziers' Co-operative Grain, Insurance, and Agency Company (N.S.W.), 101, 147, 174, 240-1
Farmers and Settlers' Association (N.S.W.), 8-9, 49, 75, 77; as pressure group, 58, 64; attempt to form party in 1914, 80-2; Bavin-Buttenshaw coalition, 276-8; branches, 63, 77, 108, 123, 273; conferences (1893) 57, (1895) 61, 65, (1901) 61, (1902) 58-9, (1904) 61, (1905) 61, (1906) 62, (1907) 60, 61, (1908) 64, (1909) 64-5, (1910) 81, (1911) 81, (1912) 81, (1913) 82, (1914) 82-3, (1915) 108, 109, (1916) 109, (1917) 116, (1918) 121, (1919) 121, (1923) 207-8, 240, (1924) 208, 226, 240, (1925) 240, (1926) 240-1, (1927) 242, (1928) 242-3, 276, (1929) 276, 277-8;

Farmers and Settlers' Assn. (N.S.W.)—*cont.* country factions, 57-9; country party idea, 64-5; executive, 62, 63, 64-5, 81-2, 108-10, 121, 122, 172, 241, 242; federal election pact (1924), 224-5, 226; finances, 174; formation, 55-7; in elections, 52, 57, 61-3, 81-2, 92, 130-1, 174-5, 184, 273, 278; Labor wing, 61-3; landholding controversy, 59-61, 80; leadership, 63; Liberal Party (pre-1914), 59-65; marketing issues (1920s) 240-3, (pre-war) 65; membership, 64, 77, 123; National Party (1917-19), 116, 121-2; non-Labor alliance (1926-7), 269-73; Progressive Party venture, 207-8, (1915-16) 108-10, 116, (Central Council representation) 170-2, (formation) 121-3, (split, 1921-2) 170-5; social basis, 60-4; structure, 63-4; tariff policies, 245-6; wheat farmers, 63-5; wheat pool (voluntary, 1920s) 147, (wartime) 99
Farmers and Settlers' Association (S.A.), 100, 113, 131, 132, 167, 184
Farmers and Settlers' Association (W.A.), 9, 10, 49, 77; branches, 77, 91; conferences (Mar. 1912) 85, (June 1912) 85, (Mar. 1913) 86, 88, (Aug. 1913) 86, 88, (1914) 93, (1915) 105-6, (1916) 107-8, 214, (1917) 117, (1919) 124; C.P. (pressure to defeat Scaddan government), 103-8; executive, 85-6, 87-8, 103-8, 117, 123, 124-5; formation, 85; in elections, 90, 93, 117-18, 127-8, 130; Liberals (early difficulties), 87-90; leadership, 87-8; membership, 77, 105-6; preferential voting (federal elections), 127; separate party, 85-6; social basis, 86, 87-8; structure, 86, 87; wheat pool, 124-5; *see also* Primary Producers' Association (W.A.)
Farmers and Settlers' Co-operative Association Ltd (N.S.W.), 49, 65
Farmers' Association (Qld), 75
Farmers' Co-operative Trading Company (N.S.W.), 37
Farmers' and Primary Producers' Unions of South Australia, 75
Farmers' Educational and Co-operative Union (U.S.A.), 6
Farmers' Non Partisan Political League (U.S.A.), 22-3
Farmers' Parliamentary Union (Qld), 52, 90
Farmers' Political Union (Qld), 52
Farmers, Property Owners and Producers' League (Vic.), 49, 74, 75
Farmers' Union (Saskatchewan, Canada), 26
Federal Defence Committee of the Primary Producers of Australia, 77
Fisher, Andrew, 93; ministry (1910-13), 76, 92
Fleming, W. M., 131, 132n., 176, 178
Forke, Robert, 24-5
Forrest, Sir John, 78-9, 87, 89-90, 93, 127
Fowler, J. M., 89
Free Selectors' Association (N.S.W.), 56
Free Trade Party (N.S.W.), 57-8
Fruit industry, 228
Fuller, George, 168-75, 205-12, 271; ministries (Dec. 1921) 172, (1922-5) 205-12

Gardiner, James, 86, 89, 104-6, 117, 123
Gibson, D. H., 126, 158
Gibson, W. G., 128, 130, 183, 185, 189, 190, 191, 227, 282, 288
Gillies, Duncan, 67, 69; ministry (1886-90), 67-70
Gippsland, 138, 152, 252
Goldsbrough, Mort and Company Ltd, 101-2, 172-3
Gormly, James, 57, 58-9
Goudie, G. L., 198, 204
Goulburn Valley (Vic.), 138, 243, 252, 259, 266
Grafton *Examiner* (N.S.W.), 155, 175-6
Grahame, W. C., 99
Grain and Foodstuffs Act, 1915 (W.A.), 105
Grain Growers' Associations (Canada), 7-8, 18-19, 26-7, 239, 295
Grand Association of Patrons of Industry (Canada), 7
Granger movement, *see* National Grange of Patrons of Husbandry
Graziers' Association of N.S.W.: Bavin-Buttenshaw coalition, 278; BAWRA, 150; changes during war, 120; conferences (1919) 120, (1920) 172, (1928) 278, (1929) 278; Council, 172-4; early history, 120; in elections, 130-1, 172-5, 184; local committees, 123, 273; membership, 120, 123; non-Labor alliance (1926-7), 269-73; Progressive Party, 208, 209-10, (formation) 120, 122-3, (representation on Central Council) 170-2, (split, 1921-2) 170-5; social basis, 120; Special Purposes Fund, 120, 123, 172-3, 174; structure, 120; tariff policy, 246; wool pool (wartime), 102
Green, Roland, 184, 234
Greene, Walter Massy, 151, 153-4, 184
Gregory, Harry, 89, 93, 130, 132n., 153, 176, 178, 184, 230, 246-7, 286-7
Groom, A. C., 73
Gullett, H. S., 245

Hall, J. J., 112, 127, 159, 199, 252
Hammond, J. D., 87
Hanslow, Harold, 43-4, 165, 251, 264-5
Harrison, T. H., 106, 213, 214, 219
Hart, Isaac, 112-13, 126, 159, 226-7
Hay, Alexander, 131, 132n., 153, 177, 184
Hicks, J. D., 11
Higgins, Sir John, 98, 148-51
Higgs, W. G., 132n.

Hill, T. H., 170
Hill, W. C., 100, 130, 160-1, 225, 282, 287, 288
Hocking, A. E., 265-6
Hofstadter, Richard, 6-7, 39
Hogan, E. J., 256, 259-60, 262, 265; ministries (1927-8) 243, 256, 259-60, (1929-32) 262, 265
Holman, W. A., 62, 169, 211; ministries (1913-16) 115, (1916-20) 115, 116, 121, 122, 168
Hughes, William Morris: Bruce-Page government (defeat of), 289-90; Commonwealth Shipping Line, 283; Country Party (conciliation) 176-8, (negotiations with, Jan. 1923) 184-91; federal election campaign (1922), 183-4; ministries (1915-16) 114-15, (1917-23) 115, 118-19, 128-9, 145-9, 156, 176-8, 182-91; National Party (difficulties in 1922), 182-3; new states movements, 231-2, 284; preferential voting, 127, 128-9; relations with economic interest groups (1917-19), 118-19; wheat pooling, 146
Hunt, A. E., 80, 116, 170-2, 173
Hunter, J. A. J., 177n., 184, 225, 234, 267, 288

Immigration Act (1925), 232
Independent Parties (U.S.A.), 4
Industrial arbitration: pre-1914 issues, 76-7, 85, 120; rural labour (N.S.W.), 120, 121, 168, 169, 270, 276
Industrial Disputes Act, 1911 (N.S.W.), 76
Industries Assistance Act, 1915 (W.A.), 105
Industries Assistance Board (W.A.), 218
Irvine, William, 70-1, 127; ministry (1902-4), 46, 70, 71

John Darling and Company, 147, 240
Johnston, E. B., 214, 218-19
Jowett, Edmund, 130

Kiernan, C. P., 71
Killen, W. W., 171n., 173, 184, 193, 211, 286
Kilpatrick, M., 156, 170
Kyabram movement, 70, 71, 159

La Follette, Robert, 22-3, 295
Land (Syd.), 172, 273, 286
Land Acts: N.S.W. (1861), 8, 31-2, 55, (1875) 8, 32, 55-6, (1884) 8, 32, 55, 56, (1889) 55, 56-7, (1895) 8, 55, 56-8, 59-60, (1903) 59, (1904) 59, (1908) 60, 80, (1912) 80; S.A., 31; Vic., 9, 31-2, 65-7
Land Law Reform Alliance (N.S.W.), 49
Land Law Reformation League (N.S.W.), 49
Lang, J. T., 168, 169, 205, 207-8, 211-12, 232, 273; ministry (1925-7), 240-2, 269-71
Latham, C. G., 219, 220, 221, 281, 282
Latham, J. G., 184, 186-93
Lawson, H. S. W., 157-8, 161-4, 254-5; ministries (1918-23) 126, 146, 157-66, 198, (with Allan, 1923-4) 198-201
Leake, R. M., 87
Lefroy, H. B., 117, 123; ministry (1917-19), 115, 117-18, 123
Legislative Councils: N.S.W. (abolition), 270; Vic. (wheat pooling), 164, 203, 250; W.A., 214
Levy, Daniel, 168, 169, 172
Ley, T. J., 122, 170-2, 205
Liberal and Country League (S.A.), 269
Liberal Association (Qld), 104, 82
Liberal Federation (S.A.), 267-9
Liberal League (W.A.), 77
Liberal Party: federal, 53, 78, 80; N.S.W., 53, 59, 80-2; Qld, 53, 90, 92; S.A., 53; Vic., 70-2, 83-5; W.A., 53
Liberal Union (Vic.), 183
Lind, Albert, 164
Lipset, S. M., 12, 15-16, 18
Local government (N.S.W.), 276
Louis Dreyfus and Company, 98, 240
Lyne Tariff, *see* Tariff issues

Macarthur Onslow, J. W., 170-2, 174
McCann, W. J., 250n., 253
McGibbon, S. J., 100, 281
McGowen, J. S.: ministry, 108
McIntosh, M., 268
McKenzie, M. K., 71, 73
Mackenzie King, W. L., 24-5, 295
Mackrell, E. J., 164n., 204
McLean, Allan, 70, 71, 73; ministry (1899-1900), 70
McLeod, Donald, 83-4
Macpherson, C. B., 14-15
McPherson, William, 198, 255, 264; ministry (1928-9), 243-4, 260-2
McWilliams, W. J., 131, 132n., 176, 184
Madden, Walter, 67, 69
Main, Hugh, 170-2
Main Roads Development Acts (1923, 1924, 1925), 227
Majority Country Party (W.A.), *see* Country Party, W.A., split (1923)
Maley, C. C., 218, 281
Maley, H. K., 146, 212-21
Mallee (Vic.): early history, 110-11; in war period, 111-13; post-war, 138, 159, 237-8, 243, 252, 253, 257, 259, 266
Marketing problems, *see* Wheat, Wool, Dairy, and Meat industries
Meat industry, 98, 228
Missingham, W. T., 245
Mitchell, Sir James, 123-4, 146, 179, 212-21, 282; ministry (1919-24) 123-5, 146, 179, 212-19, (1930-3) 282
Monger, A. J., 78-9, 87-90, 93, 105-8, 117, 179, 213-21
Morris-Rankin Report (N.S.W., 1883), 56

Munro, D., 88
Munro, E. J., 273
Murray, John, 83; ministry (1909-12), 72

National Council of Wool Selling Brokers of Australia, 148-50
National Democratic Council (Qld), 180
National Grange of Patrons of Husbandry (U.S.A.), 3-4
National Greenback Party (U.S.A.), 5
National Party: federal, 114-15, 118-19, 182-3, 184-91, 289-90; N.S.W., 116, 122; Qld, 180; W.A., 53
National Political Council (Qld), 104
National Progressive Party (Canada), 295
National Progressive Party (N.S.W.), 82, 109
National Unions (Brisb. and Melb.), *see* Non-Labor Finance Committees
New England (N.S.W.), 273, 275, 277; *see also* New states movements
New State Magazine (N.S.W.), 155
New states movements, 44-5, 154-7, 208-9, 231-2, 277, 283-4
Nock, H. K., 277-8
Non-Labor Finance Committees: Constitutional Union (Melb.), 85; Consultative Council (Perth) 280-1, 282, (Syd.) 174, 272-3, 274; National Union (Brisb.) 180, (Melb.) 182, 235
Norco Ltd, 245
Norris, Frank, 18
North and North-Western Development League (N.S.W.), 155
North Coast Development League (N.S.W.), 155, 176
Northern Alliance (U.S.A.), 5
Northern Free Selectors' Association (N.S.W.), 56
Northern New State League (N.S.W.), 155-7, 209, 277, 284, 286

Oakes, C. W., 168, 170
Old, F. E., 158, 164, 198, 263

Padbury, M. T., 280-1
Page, Earle Christmas Grafton, 30; Australian Country Party Association (formation), 284-6; autobiography, 297; Bruce-Page coalition, 124, 191-5, (views on) 222, 282, 287; election (1919), 131; election pacts (1924) 200-1, 202, 222-7, (1928-9) 288-9; Hughes (negotiations, 1921), 176-8; in elections (1922) 183-4, (1925) 232-3; leader, 176, 193, 227, 248-9, 286-7, 295, 296; life, 175-6; marketing, 228, 229, 244; National Party (and Country Party negotiations, Jan. 1923) 184-91, (dissidents, 1922) 182-3; new states movements, 156-7, 209, 231-2, 283-4; tariff policy, 229-31, 246-7; Treasurer, 222, 227-8, 230-1, 287-8
Parkes, Sir Henry: ministry (with Robertson, 1878-82), 56
Partridge, E. H., 18, 143
Party system, Vic.: Conservative-Liberal division, 67, 70; regrouping (1899-1902), 70
Pastoral Review (Melb.), *see Pastoralists' Review*
Pastoralists' Association of Victoria, 150
Pastoralists' Association of West Darling (N.S.W.), 102
Pastoralists' Association of Western Australia, 213-14, 219-20
Pastoralists' Union of N.S.W., *see* Graziers' Association of N.S.W.
Pastoralists' Union of Southern Riverina (N.S.W.), 102
Pastoralists' Review, 79, 81, 92
Paterson, Thomas, 130, 189n., 192, 194, 201, 234, 244-5, 282, 283, 287, 288
Patten, Robert, 63, 64, 65, 80, 87
Peacock, Alexander, 254, 255; ministries (1901-2) 45-6, 70, 71, (1914-17) 126, (1924) 201-3, (with Allan, 1924-7) 204-5, 243, 249-56
Pearce, George, 177
Peake, A. H., 115
People's Liberal Party (Vic.), 84
People's Party (Vic.), 9, 74, 77, 84-5
Perdriau, R. S., 156, 170-2
Pickering, W. G., 214, 218, 219, 226-7, 251-2, 253-4
Piesse, A. E., 123
Pike, Mr Justice, 152-3
Political issues, N.S.W.: cement contracts, 211-12; industrial arbitration, 270, 276; local government, 276; railway administration, 275; road funds, 210-11, 275
Population: growth of cities, 44; trends (1921 Commonwealth Census), 133-4
Populist movement (U.S.A.), 5-6, 23
Port Huon Co-operative Company (Tas.), 181
Pratten, H. E., 183, 185, 190, 245
Prendergast, G. M., 163, 202-4; ministry (1924), 203-4
Price, R. A., 170
Primary Producer (Perth), 115, 124-5
Primary Producers' Association (Tas.), 181, 233
Primary Producers' Association (W.A.): branches, 217n.; conferences (1922) 214-15, (1923) 217-18, (1924) 279-80, (1925) 226, (1926) 280; constitution, 214-18, 279-80; Country Party (influence) 179, 212-21, (relations, 1924-30) 279-82; district councils, 215-16, 217-18, 221; executive, 213-21; federal pact proposal (1924), 224-5, 226; finances, 282; in elections, 184, 218-19, 233; membership, 282n.; Pastoralists' Association and Chamber of Mines (association with), 213-14, 219-20; radical

Primary Producers' Assn. (W.A.)—*cont.* group (late 1920s), 279-82; tariff policy, 245-7; *see also* Farmers and Settlers' Association (W.A.)
Primary Producers' Union (N.S.W.), 245
Primary Producers' Union (Qld), 119-20, 131, 179-80
Primary Producers' Union (Vic.), 251-4, 256, 259, 262-5
Progressive movement (U.S.A.), 6-7
Progressive Party (N.S.W.): Central Council, 170-2, 173, 206, 209-10; Fuller government, 205-12; new states, 154-7; post-war (1920-5), 120, 121-3; pre-war, 58; social bases, 138-9; 'True Blue' split (1921-2), 168-75; wartime (1915-17), 108-10, 116; *see also* Country Party, N.S.W.
Protection Party (N.S.W.), 57-8
Prowse, J. H., 130, 153, 184, 246-7, 225, 230, 286-7

Queensland Dairy Industry Advisory Board, 152
Queensland Farmers' Alliance, 9, 49
Queensland Farmers' Union, 49, 77, 179-81; and Qld Country Party (formation), 119-20; and Qld Liberal Party, 104; and separate party (pre-war), 90, 92; branches, 77; in elections, 90, 92, 104, 131; membership, 77

Railway administration (N.S.W.), 275
Reid, G. H., 74; federal ministry (1904-5), 195; N.S.W. ministry (1894-5), 57-8
Reseigh, Edwin, 198
Riverina (N.S.W.), 8, 55, 56-7, 65, 238, 243, 277
Riverina Development League (N.S.W.), 277
Riverina New State League, 156-7, 209, 277
Riverina Severance League, *see* Riverina New State League
Road funds (N.S.W.), 210-11, 275
Robertson, Sir John: ministry (with Parkes, 1878-82), 56
Roosevelt, Theodore, 6
Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria, 48, 74
Royal Agricultural Society of Western Australia, 47, 48
Royal Commissions: Constitution (Peden, 1929), 284; land (Vic., 1878), 66; wheat industry (1934), 236, 237-8, 244
Rural Bank of New South Wales, 237
Rural credit, 236-8
Rural Producers' Association (Vic.), 77
Rural Workers' Union, 77, 85
Rutledge, T. L. F., 170-2
Ryan, T. J., 115; ministry (1915-19) 104, 115, 119

Sampson, R. S., 214, 218
Scaddan, John, 212, 213-15, 220; ministry (1911-16), 9, 90, 104-7
Scullin, J. H., 128, 289; ministry (1929-32), 244, 289
Selectors' associations (N.S.W.), 55-7
Soldier settlers, 152-3
Soldiers' and Citizens' Federation (N.S.W.), 122
South Australian Farmers' Committee, 145
South Australian Farmers' Co-operative Union, 37, 49, 100
Southern Alliance (U.S.A.), 5
Stanistreet, H. E., 88-9
Steele Rudd, *see* Davis, A. H.
Stewart, Percy Gerald: Bruce-Page government (1923-4) 191, 194, (defeat of) 289; Country Progressive Party (Vic.), 251-4; election (1919), 130, 132n.; federal coalition proposal (1921), 178; federal election pact, 201, 202, 224-7; independent member, 233, 252, 264, 281, 283, 284, 288, 290; life, 111-12; National Party (negotiations, Jan. 1923), 185, 189-90; resignation from cabinet (Aug. 1924), 222, 225; V.F.U. (formation) 112, (radicals) 165; Victorian Country Party (1917-19), 126, 158-9, 160, 161; Victorian Country Parties (reunification, 1927-30), 264; wheat pooling (advocates compulsory), 229, 244
Storey, John, 168; ministry (1920-1), 147, 168, 211
Stuart, Sir Alexander: ministry (1882-5), 56
Stubbs, S., 281
Stradbroke, Lord, 162
Sugar industry, 98, 228
Sunraysia Daily (Vic.), 189

Tablelands electorate (N.S.W.), 8, 55, 56-7, 81, 139, 147-8, 277
Tamworth Daily Leader, 286
Tariff Board, 193, 229-30, 246
Tariff issues, 9, 32, 34, 43, 66, 68-9, 78-9, 86-7, 89-90, 118, 229-31, 245-7; Lyne Tariff (1908), 9, 34, 78; Massy Greene Tariff (1921), 144, 153-4; Pratten Tariffs (1926, 1928), 245-7
Tasmanian Farmers, Stockowners and Orchardists' Association, 131, 181, 233, 267
Taverner, J. W., 71, 73
Tenterfield Star (N.S.W.), 155
Thomson, A., 214, 218-19, 220-1, 280
Thompson, V. C., 154-5, 184, 193, 209, 230, 231-2, 284, 286, 288
Thorby, V. C., 242, 274
Tout, F. H., 278
Town and Country Political Federation (Tas.), 233

Townley, A. C., 22, 23
Trefle, J. L., 61-3
Trethowan, A. K., 64, 80-1, 109, 116, 121, 211, 241, 272-3, 274, 278
Turner, F. J., 3
Turner, George, 70; ministry (1900-1), 45, 70, 71

United Cane Growers' Association (Qld), 119, 179-80, 224-5, 234
United Farmers' organizations (Canada), *see* Grain Growers' Associations
United Graziers' Association (Qld), 28, 119-20, 179-80
United Party (Qld) 180, (W.A.) 219

Victorian Chamber of Agriculture, 9, 49, 54, 74
Victorian Chamber of Manufactures, 247
Victorian Country Party (1927-): branches, 264; Central Council, 264-5, *see also* Victorian Farmers' Union (1916-27); conferences (1927) 243, 254, 264, (1928) 264, (1929) 264-5, (1933) 265, (1944) 266; P.P.U. (negotiations, 1927-30), 256, 259, 264-5
Victorian Farmers' Protectionist Associations, 9, 48-53 *passim*, 68-70, 73
Victorian Farmers' Union (1879-80), 9, 49, 67
Victorian Farmers' Union (1916-27): BAWRA, 150-1; branches, 112, 125, 251; Bruce-Page coalition (1923), 194; Central Council, 112, 125-6, 162, 165-6, 198-205, 226, 250-1, 253-4; conference (1916) 112-13, (1918) 158, (1919) 159, 199, (1921) 165, (1923) 194, 198, (1924) 200-1, 222, 224, 250, (1925) 226-7, 243, 249-50, (1926) 250-2, 253-4; constitution, 226, 252; Country Party, Federal (establishment), 125-6; Country Party, parliamentary (formation) 125-6, (relations) 198-205, 249-54; factions, 157-61; 165-6, 198, 200-1, 249-54; *Farmers' Advocate*, 112; farmers' party, 112-13; federal pact (proposed 1924), 222-7; finances, 85, 251; formation, 27, 112-13; in elections, 125-30, 132, 161, 163-4, 184; marketing issues (1920s), 243; membership, 112, 125, 251; preferential voting (federal elections), 126-9; prewar movements, 74, 75; social basis, 112-13, 125; structure, 73, 112; tariff policies, 245-6; wheat pool (crisis, 1921) 161-6, (proposal for compulsory, 1920s) 250-1, 253
Victorian Producers' Co-operative Company Ltd, 37, 101
Victorian Wheat-Growers' Corporation Ltd, 146, 161-6, 203, 240, 250
Voluntary wheat pools: Aust., 21, 146-7, 213, 228-9, 240, 241, 244; Canada, 21, 239
Vowles, W. J., 120, 179-80

Waddell, C. G., 272-3, 278
Wade, C. G., 82, 109; ministry (1907-10), 59
Wagga Free Selectors' Association (N.S.W.), 56
Walter, A.L.N., 152, 198, 203
Wangaratta Chronicle (Vic.), 158
Ward, Russel, 38, 40
War Precautions Act (1914-16), 113-14, 118-19, 145, 151
Watt, W. A., 127, 182, 183, 184, 189; ministries (1912-13) 83-4, (1913-14) 84
Wearne, W. E., 116, 121-3, 168-75, 205, 210
Weaver, I. J., 126, 158, 164n., 253
Western Australian Producers' Co-operative, 49
Western District (Vic.), 138
Westralian Farmers' Ltd, 101, 124-5, 147, 213, 240
Wettenhall, M. E., 164, 198, 255
Wheat Board (Canada), 20-1, 239
Wheat Growers' Pooling and Marketing Co. Ltd (N.S.W.), 147
Wheat industry, 1-2, 12-13, 20-1; in Australia, 1-2, 12-13, 20-1, 31-8, 65-6, 78, 96-101, 104, 134-5, 136, 140, 144-7, 161-6, 228-9, 236-44
Wheat Marketing Acts, 1918-22 (W.A.), 124-5
Wheat pools (Aust.), 96-101, 124-5, 144-6, 147, 207-8, 213
Wheatgrowers' Association (Vic.), 264
Wheatgrowers' Union (W.A.), 281-2
Whitsitt, J. T. H., 181n., 184, 230
Wienholt, Arnold, 131, 132n., 184
Wilding, T. H., 87, 89
Williams, H. P., 29
Willmott, F. E. S., 105, 106, 117, 123-4, 218
Wilson, Frank, 89, 107, 116-17; ministry (1916-17), 107-8, 116-17
Wilson, J., 170
Wilson, R. V., 191, 288
Wimmera (Vic.), 10, 138, 148, 159, 238, 243, 252, 253, 254, 266
Wimmera Farmers' Association (Vic.), 48
Wood, Henry Wise, 17, 24-61, 143
Wool industry, 98, 101-2, 134-5, 147-51
Wool pool, 101-2, 135
Wright, Judith, 13-14

Dr B. D. Graham, formerly a Research Fellow in the Department of Political Science, the Australian National University, was born in New Zealand in 1931. He is a graduate of the University of New Zealand and carried out post-graduate research in the A.N.U. between 1955 and 1964. In 1959 he was awarded an A.N.U. Travelling Scholarship which enabled him to spend a year in Paris, at the *Fondation Nationale des sciences politiques*. His work there resulted in the book *French Socialists and Tripartisme*.

He is now Lecturer in Politics at the University of Sussex.

Dr Graham has published a number of articles on Australian politics and is particularly interested in the field of comparative politics. He has carried out field-work in India on contemporary Indian politics, on which he is preparing material for publication.